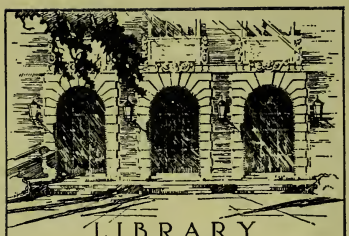

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THE WELLFIELDS.

THE WELLFIELDS.

A Novel.

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL,
AUTHOR OF 'THE FIRST VIOLIN' AND 'PROBATION.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
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1880.
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MARSHALL
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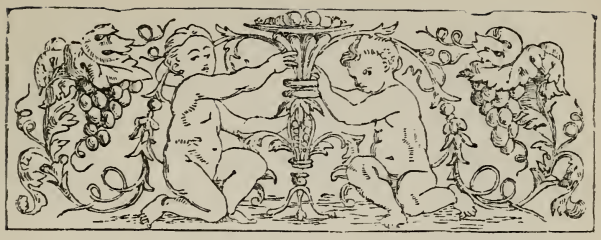
To

MY FRIENDS AT LOWESWATER,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF SOME PLEASANT DAYS
SPENT THERE WITH THEM.



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THE WELLFIELDS.

PRELUDE.

IN very early days, in the beginnings of Saxon Christianity, a certain Saxon potentate erected a church at Wellfield, now a village in the north-east corner of a great and wealthy English county. This church he called, as many churches in those times were called, the White Church; and since it stood in a peculiar situation, in close proximity to the foot of a lovely wooded rise, he added the further distinguishing title of 'under the Hill,' and for hundreds of years it was known as the 'White Church under

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the Hill.' Generations came and went, and worshipped there, and led lives pious or otherwise: it was a wild race of people that dwelt in that well-watered valley, and the White Church under the Hill was known far and wide, long before such things as monasteries and cloisters, with their attendant good and evil, were thought of. It was a wild and lovely region, watered by three fair streams well stocked with fish, while venison and game abounded in the woods and on the moors around. Gradually a village clustered around the White Church. Wealthy and pious persons made gifts to it, and built houses in the vicinity of it, until the Normans came, and soon after that changes took place. Monasteries and abbeys and nunneries sprang up, here and there, throughout the land; and it so chanced that a certain pious baron presented to a company of Cistercian monks a very fair site by the river, and not far from the White Church. There they began to build themselves an abbey, the fame of which soon spread far and wide in the land. Its

farms were fat, its lands productive, its abbots proud, its hospitality unbounded; for three centuries they built at it and lavished upon it all manner of beauty, in the shape of rare carvings of oak and stone. Its church was as large as many a cathedral; it stood on an exquisite site beside the river, and the size of the abbey-grounds soon exceeded that of the whole village and the White Church counted into the bargain. Then, while it was still in its glory and still unfinished, while the proudest and most domineering of its abbots was ruling the land around with a rod of iron, and hunting out witches and chasing them over Penhull, the great hill hard by, and burning them when he caught them, and was rioting in power—then, under the ferocious auspices of the Eighth Harry of glorious memory, a reform was effected—a reform which took the shape of a sack of the glorious abbey. Its church was demolished the friars disbanded, the proud abbot was gibbeted in full view of his birthplace over the water, on a wooded mound called to this

day 'The Abbot's Knoll.' All the church plate and jewellery was confiscated by the royal robber; while the abbey and the lands thereof were magnanimously presented by him—what was left of them—to two of the neighbouring gentry, one John de Wellfield and one Ralph de Burnshire, which gentlemen had gallantly espoused the cause of the king, and had assisted in driving forth the monks from the abbey at the end of the pike. The families of Wellfield and Burnshire presently were united by the marriage of the sole heiress of the Burnshires with the sole heir of the Wellfields, and it was at this juncture that another great property called Brentwood, some three miles away, lapsed, through lack of direct heirs male, from the Burnshire family to a collateral branch of the same, named Waddington, which Waddingtons continued to be devout Roman Catholics, while the Wellfields turned heretics, to the great distress of the reverend fathers, the Jesuits, who about this period in the family history were beginning to make a

great noise in the world, and to exert their power and make it felt. Wellfield Abbey, then, got into heretic hands, and the heretics continued to be men of mark; while the pious and devout Waddingtons had the ill luck (or the ill grace) to die out, and their representatives, in the year of grace 1794, let their ancient abode on the hill-side at a nominal rent to those Jesuit fathers who were driven from their French college at L—— by the Revolution. They were thrifty, these Jesuit fathers, and eventually bought the whole estate, and their representatives possess it to this day, and have made of it the first Roman Catholic seminary in the north at any rate, if not in the whole of England. Indeed, that corner of this favoured land is a Catholic stronghold.

Meanwhile, the heretic Wellfields of Wellfield continued to flourish, seemingly, like a green bay-tree; though, taking the royalist side in the Stuart troubles, they are said to have suffered heavy losses therefrom. The most perfect *entente cordiale* always existed

between them and the neighbouring Catholic gentry, and the reverend fathers at Brentwood; and they were always classed amongst the first families of the neighbourhood when they were at home. Of late years they had lived much abroad. At the time now referred to, 18—, there were only two representatives of the line: John Felix Wellfield, and a son; the said John Felix had been an only child, as had his father before him, and his own wife was recently dead.

Meantime, while the gorgeous abbey church, which had been centuries a-building, had been so razed to the ground as that hardly a vestige of it remained, save a green space in the shape of a cross to show where it had once stood, and while the two great entrances of the abbey—Monk's-gate and Abbot's-gate—were like great ruined caverns, grown over with ivy; while the cloisters were a line of hoary ruins, and nought of the abbey remained save enough to make a quaint old dwelling-house—all this time the

White Church under the Hill stood intact—added to a little here and there; enriched by the spoils of the abbey—they rescued the exquisite carved black oak stalls and a magnificent rood-screen, and set them up in the humbler building. Now it was a Protestant place of worship; in the midst of the old oak pews some evangeliser had set up a 'three-decker,' in which the service was performed, and there is no record of this piece of vandalism having met with the condign punishment it deserved. It—the 'three-decker'—stared down upon an ancient pew of black carved oak which glittered like a mirror, which pew was said—along with many others—to be the oldest in England. Built by one Roger of Wellfield, it had been left by him as a legacy for 'the proud dames of Wellfield' to sit in every Sunday, which 'proud dames' are at this date represented by three decrepit old women, who enjoy the best view in the church of—the pulpit. The old church is sturdy yet, having survived so many changes, including a visit from George Fox,

in the days when he went about denouncing 'steeple-houses,' and who stood in the aisle and stigmatised the then priest of Wellfield as 'a light, scornful, chaffy fellow.' It shows no signs of decay. May it be long before such symptoms appear in it!

* * * * * *

A party of visitors, thirty years ago and more, were strolling round this old church one summer afternoon, escorted by a young woman who had the keys, and who had told them all she knew about the place and its history.

'Then does the present Mr. Wellfield not live at the abbey?' inquired a young lady who was of the party.

'No, ma'am. They say he lives a deal in Italy, and the lady he married came from those parts. Young Mr. Wellfield is staying at the abbey now, and his tutor says it's because of his health; but they do say that Mr. Wellfield is going to be married again, and wants him away.'

The visitors exchanged glances, and the young woman continued:

'See, there's the young gentleman looking in now, and his playfellow, old Mr. Leyburn's lad.'

Indeed, at this moment two boys, whose ages might be ten and eleven, or eleven and twelve years, came strolling into the church by the chancel door, which stood open, their arms about one another's shoulders, and their faces rubbing together now and then after the fashion of a couple of friendly ponies. One was tall and slender, and was of an extraordinary beauty of face and figure, with solemn, liquid dark eyes, and a very un-English look. The other was not quite so tall, was sturdy, square and strong, but clumsily built—'a little *pleb*,' thought the young lady, who was watching them with interest. The rest of her party had strolled on with the young woman to look at proud Abbot ———'s tombstone, which, said tradition, if a Wellfield walked over it, he should not live out the year. But the girl—she was no more—remained where she was until the boys came up to her, and they were

all standing at the foot of the chancel steps, just outside the rood-screen.

'Have you come to see the church?' she asked, smiling.

'We saw the door open, *signorina*, and came in,' said the beautiful boy; 'but we can see it as often as we want—twice every Sunday.'

His voice was sweet; his accent more than half Italian.

'Do you live here then? What is your name?' she asked, wishing to draw him out.

'No; I do not live here. I am only staying a few months here. I am called Jerome Wellfield, and the abbey belongs to my father.'

'Indeed! Would you not like to live in such a beautiful home?'

'If it were not so cold in England I would; but I like Italy: it is warm there.'

'Yes. And you—what are you called?' she asked, turning to the other lad.

'John Leyburn,' he made answer, looking

at her with clear, considerate, rather light-brown eyes, which looked very ineffective beside the velvet softness and darkness of young Wellfield's.

'You live here, I am sure.'

'Yes; I live at Abbot's Knoll with my father and mother.'

'And are you great friends? Have you known one another long?'

'Oh! we have known one another a long time—two months,' replied young Wellfield; 'and we are great friends, aren't we, Jack?'

'Yes,' replied 'Jack,' with much deliberation.

Indeed all he did and said was deliberate.

'And can you tell me what each of you likes better than anything else?' she asked, loth to break off the conversation, and charmed with Master Jerome's grace and beauty. 'You, Jerome Wellfield, what do you like best?'

'I like so many things that are nice,' said the boy, with a pensive smile; and glancing downwards, the long lashes swept his pale

cheek. 'I like music; and I liked mamma. I liked her drawing-room at Frascati, where the beautiful ladies used to come when I was a little boy. I like—oh! I like everything that is not ugly,' he concluded, looking rather bored.

'And you, my boy?' she turned to the other.

'I like birds'-nesting,' was the reply, deliberate, but prompt.

'What, better than anything? Oh, horrible!'

'He does not mean birds'-nesting, exactly,' Jerome explained for him. 'He means all sorts of things—going into the woods, and learning about birds and watching them, and plants, and butterflies, and all that sort of thing.'

'Oh, natural history!'

'Yes; natural history,' replied the sturdy-looking boy.

'I don't care for the birds in the woods here,' said Jerome, carelessly; 'ugly little brown things! I liked the golden pheasants,

and the scarlet humming-birds, and the big white macaw, and the *papagei*—parrot, you know—in Countess Necromi's aviary.'

'Laura, my dear, we must go. We have to do Brentwood yet, you know, and then to drive to the Lathebys.'

'Yes; I suppose we have. Well, boys, good afternoon. Will you shake hands with me?'

'Yes, *signorina. À rivederci*,' said young Wellfield, looking so enchantingly amiable that Miss Laura stooped and kissed him.

'Since you say *à rivederci*, I suppose you do not count me as an ugly thing?' she said, laughing.

'Oh no, the very opposite!' he smiled, and she tapped his cheek, and said he was a precocious boy. She felt no interest in poor John Leyburn, but being of a kind disposition held out her hand to him too. He flushed all over his plain young face, and asked:

'Will you—would you tell me what you are called?'

With a rapid flash of intuition 'Laura' realised that with all Jerome's pretty words and liquid glances, he had not troubled himself on this point. She put her hand on the plain boy's shoulder, and kissed him too, saying :

'My name is Laura Dewhirst. By the time you are grown up you will have forgotten it, and I shall be such an old woman that you would not know me if you met me.'

All three laughed, and with another nod to the boys Miss Dewhirst ran after her papa and mamma. The two boys left the church, and the young woman locked the door and contemplated the gratuity she had received with great satisfaction.

'Where shall we go?' asked Jerome.

'To Mr. Philips, to do our Latin.'

'Oh, Latin!' sighed the boy. 'I never used to do any Latin when mamma was alive—before I came to England.'

'Would you like to go back to Italy?'

'Not much, because papa always makes

me feel such a very little boy. Mr. Philips doesn't.'

'Well, come along then! Was not that a beautiful lady?'

'Very pretty. She liked talking to us.'

'I liked talking to her,' said John Leyburn, sedately, as they turned in at the abbey gate, and went up the river-walk.

STAGE I.

CHAPTER I.

EMS.

IT was half-past nine in the evening. The concert in the great Saal of the *Kurhaus* at Ems was just over, and the audience streamed out, with a clatter of conversation, and a sudden restoration of animation, into the fresher and yet deliciously warm air of the gardens. It was the end of July, the height of the season at Ems; and that small, enervating, fashionable watering-place was thronged with visitors of every age, nation, and rank, from the royal and imperial, as represented in the

persons of Germany and Russia, down to the English family of Robinson, who had never felt so genteel before, or been in (whether of or not) such aristocratic company in their lives, and the German family of Braun, who were wealthy, and who revelled luxuriously each day at a different *table d'hôte* of a different hotel, and who sat in a row in the *Kurgarten*, morning and afternoon, listening devotedly to the music, and occasionally murmuring '*Schön!*' if it pleased them. Or, oh joy! standing in rapt respect and attention, as an old white-headed, white-moustached man in a grey summer-suit came walking along, very erect, one hand behind his back, in friendly converse with, now one, now another, bare-headed gentleman who kept just a pace behind him.

'There's the emperor! *dear* old thing!' whisper all the Miss Robinsons, standing up too, as the grey old gentleman comes past.

'*Unser Kaiser!*' murmur the Brauns with beaming smiles of satisfaction, and gazing at him with broad-faced loyalty.

This 'watching for the emperors,' and the thrills of emotion which ran through every loyal heart when they were visible, was the chief pastime of the day; and if one failed to see the emperors, there were always those who had lived near them—princesses, countesses, baronesses, and their consorts; highnesses of every degree of transparency and serenity, half the *vons* in the Almanach de Gotha; together with unpronounceable Russians, fascinating Poles, well-known diplomatists, representing both the *suaviter in modo* and the *fortiter in re*—to wit, the 'blood and iron' policies of their respective courts. All these were there, besides the shoals of nobodies who bought up the *Kurlisten* in order to read their own names in close proximity to those of somebodies, and who, it is to be hoped, felt rewarded by these and similar privileges for the crowding and pushing and swindling to which they were in other matters subjected.

On the night in question the concert-room had been thronged, for the two emperors and

their suites had condescended to look in for a few moments, and the orchestra had performed the Russian national hymn with great spirit and much applause. The distinguished guests were felt to be still lingering somewhere about the gardens; and moreover the river was illuminated, and was dazzling with lines of fairy lights, from the bridge opposite the Darmstädter Hof to the other bridge at the extreme end of the *Kurgarten*—and of civilisation, of course, in Ems—and beyond the house called the *Vier Thürme*, at which the Russian monarch was lodging.

Two barges, brightly illuminated with the imperial crowns and lovingly-entwined initials of Russia and Germany, were floating about the river, while 'the music' on board alternately played *Die Wacht am Rhein* and the Russian national anthem—a spectacle most thrilling and edifying for all loyal souls; if somewhat less enchanting to the musicians and boatmen who perspired in the glare and smell and heat of the lamps, and industriously paddled up and down the little Lahn.

below the walls of the broad walk of the *Kurgarten.*

Down that broad walk, from the concert-room, came a crowd of the notabilities and otherwise, who had composed the audience; all chattering, laughing, flirting, and intriguing in almost every European tongue.

About the middle of the throng came a group of some four or five ladies and gentlemen, and walking a little in advance of the others with one of the men beside her, a tall girl whose accent was English, though she spoke German. Some dark thick trees overhung that part of the walk, making it dark on the side next the river wall; but the lamps cast a bright light upon the girl's face, and showed its every feature and the play of its expression clearly and distinctly to one who sat on a bench in one of the little recesses in the wall which almost overhung the river; and who from this position had for some time been indifferently watching the brilliant throng as they trooped past.

As the girl came on, now looking straight

before her, now turning her head to speak to the man, who from the thickness of the crowd was compelled to go just half a pace behind her, the hidden watcher observed her closely and intently. She was tall, well-formed, and well-developed. There was much grace and a great deal of pride in her carriage; her head was habitually carried high, as might easily be seen; her face was very handsome indeed, even splendid, with a brow like Chaucer's nun:

> 'And sickerly she had a fayre forehead,
> It was almoste a spanne brode, I trow,
> For hardily she was not undergrowe.'

A large, well-cut mouth, in the sweep of whose lips there was both thought and grandeur; bright, glossy, chestnut hair, rich in hue and crisply waving; fine dark-grey eyes, with level brows, the eyes deep-set and critical in expression; her whole aspect was dignified, and yet there was assuredly a gleam of humour in her eyes, as she stepped composedly on, in her light, softly falling dress and broad plumed black hat.

'Tell me, Herr von Lemde—you have made a study of the nobility, I know——'

'It is true, *mein Fräulein.* What ought a man to study, if not his own order?'

'And that *such* an order! Indeed, you are right. I want to know who that lovely woman near us was, in a dress like a cloud of creamy muslin and lace. I thought she must be a Pole, from her gracefulness and from the spirited way in which she spoke.'

'You were right,' he said earnestly. 'It was the Princess ——.'

'Thank you very much. I feel happier now. Suppose it had turned out to be some Mrs. Smith, or Frau Müller!'

'I fear, *mein Fräulein*, that you are a little tinged with——'

'But, *liebe* Sara,' cried a lady behind, 'it is getting late, and we have such a long drive.'

'Oh, Carla, don't go yet!' expostulated, not Sara, but a German girl, dark, handsome, and defiant-looking. 'It is so fine; and we have not seen the emperor, and, after all, it is not so late.'

'Oh, it is quite early!' said an English girl who was of the party.

She addressed as Sara at this moment turned, and the whole group paused, a few paces from the place where the silent watcher sat. He had turned aside as soon as Sara had passed, and was now gazing intently down into the mysterious eddies of the river, his chin propped on his hand.

'Just as you like, Gräfin,' said Sara Ford, smiling; 'it is very nice here, and Herr von Lemde's society makes dulness out of the question.'

Evidently Miss Ford, dignified though she looked, was not above amusing herself at the expense of a rather stupid young man.

Baron Lemde smiled all over his handsome, meaningless face, and dropped a little into the rear, embracing Miss Ford's shawl with effusion, while she stood, still the centre of the group, and the Countess of Trockenau paused, looking thoughtful.

'It is too bad of you, Miss Ford,' said the other English girl in her ear. 'How can you

make fun of poor Lemde and make others laugh at him in that way ?'

Sara smiled a bright, frank, disdainful smile, and the Countess of Trockenau said :

'Well, shall we be going ?'

'Oh—h—h !' sighed the younger English girl, with an accent of disappointment.

'*Mein Fräulein*,' began Lemde, bending towards Sara, who neither heard nor saw him ; or if she did, did not notice him.

He saw that her eyes were fixed upon some one who approached them ; her lips were gravely set, yet in their sweet and gracious curve there was an expression which, though it was not for him, made the simple young baron's heart beat faster. His glance followed hers. The silent watcher had arisen from his hiding-place, and was advancing towards them. He met Sara Ford's eyes, and took off his hat. In another moment they were shaking hands, and though she was self-possessed, and almost distant in her manner, poor Hans von Lemde's heart fell.

'Good-evening, Miss Ford.'

'Good-evening, Mr. Wellfield. I did not see you at the concert. Were you not there?'

'No; I have been sitting here by the river instead. I hope you are well?'

'Quite well, I thank you. And your——'

The countess had seen and accosted him, and he turned towards her.

'You stay late to-night, *gnädige Frau*,' said he, kissing her hand with sedate gravity.

'Mr. Wellfield! ah, that reminds me—your *Herr Vater*, how is he—any better? I sent one of my men to inquire while we were in the concert, but have not seen him yet.'

She was a very pretty woman of eight or nine and twenty—a small, brilliant brunette; and Jerome Wellfield was dark too, yet the contrast between them was a startling one.

'I thank you,' he answered; 'my father is somewhat stronger to-night. I trust he will soon be quite well again.'

'I hope so; and your sister, she is not with you to-night?'

'Avice—she did not wish to leave my father; and then, she is a child as yet.'

'Is she? I should have said— What is it?'

'See, *liebe* Trockenau, his majesty is coming,' said a German lady of the party, and with a quick movement the group was divided.

The German ladies, being both of rank, and *geborenen* of distinguished families, and Hans Lemde, stood stock-still by the road-side, waiting until the emperor should pass, to make their reverences and receive a recognition; while the English girls, Jerome Wellfield, and a German man who was not a *von*, strolled off down a side-walk. Sara Ford and Jerome Wellfield insensibly, but as if by general consent, dropped a little behind. The underlying sparkle of malice and mockery had died out of the young lady's eyes, as she turned to her companion, saying:

'I am glad your father is better, Mr. Wellfield, for I had heard that he was very ill.'

'You are very kind. He really does seem

better to-night, and I am in hopes that the attack will pass over, as all the others have done, though it has certainly been a severer one than usual.'

'You look as if you had been watching and sitting up—have you?'

'Oh, a mere trifle. My father gets nervous, and, as you may easily imagine, a large hotel is not the most comfortable place in which to be taken ill.'

'No, indeed.'

'Avice insisted on my coming out to-night. And you, Miss Ford, are you enjoying yourself at Count Trockenau's?'

'Very much. The change from the hot, dusty town, and from my paint-smelling atelier is really delightful. Everything up at Trockenau is so fresh, and the society is very amusing—yes, really exceedingly amusing.'

Sara laughed as she spoke—a pleasant, round, though not loud laugh.

'Herr von Lemde's society makes dulness out of the question,' said Wellfield, composedly.

Miss Ford reddened a little.

'Oh, did you hear all that? Well, who could be dull with Herr von Lemde? So long as I know that I may quit his society whenever I choose, he is delightfully amusing; and if I knew that I had to endure his society whether I liked it or not, I should at once become desperate, and capable of any crime, I think, so that in any case dulness is out of the question.'

Wellfield laughed.

'How long are you staying?' he asked.

'Another week, I think, at least. The countess is very kind, and will not hear of my leaving sooner. You, I suppose, will remain with your father?'

'I shall remain with my father at present,' he answered.

There was a pause as they paced along the side-walk, somewhat removed from the glare of the lamps, and felt, each with a different degree of intensity, that they were alone. The other girls and their companions had fallen behind, and the countess

and the others had not yet come up, glorified and hallowed by their interview with their Imperial Master.

Sara Ford, beautiful, talented, and charming, was an artist, almost alone in the world, fatherless, motherless, and with very little money, but with great talent and high ambition. She was spending her holiday at the country house, near Nassau, of the Count and Countess of Trockenau, her fast friends, and almost her only rich or distinguished patrons. Jerome Wellfield, who walked by her side, was the heir to an old name and a fair estate, of whose beauty she had heard him speak in terms which, with him, might pass for enthusiastic. This enthusiasm was the result of a visit to the said house years ago, when he had been a mere child, and so deep had been the impression then made upon him by the beauty and desirableness of the house of his fathers, that he was firmly resolved, far from following his father's example of absenteeism, to settle there as soon as conveniently might be. His acquaintance with Sara Ford had

not been a very long one ; he had met her at the Countess of Trockenau's house about a month ago, during the first part of her visit ; yet, even now, neither ever saw the other without feeling a secret thrill of joy. As they silently walked on, she suddenly looked up at him, almost involuntarily—for though she was 'more than common tall,' he had somewhat to bend his head to speak to her—and found his dark, sombre, and, as she felt, most beautiful eyes, fixed upon her face. She blushed a little, and sighed quickly. His face, like some exquisite ivory cameo in its perfect outlines, and in the still, severe beauty of its contours, haunted her with a persistence which would not be accounted for merely by the fact that she, as an artist by nature and by trade, must delight in all things beautiful. For it was not all delight, far from it, which she felt in the haunting presence of that face. There was delight, but even more strongly there was the sense of captivity, the intuitive consciousness that she, like Gretchen, might make her moan :

'Meine Ruh' ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer ;
Ich finde sie nimmer
Und nimmermehr !'

'Did you enjoy the concert ?' asked Jerome, suddenly, after that long look which had passed between them.

'Yes, in a way. I don't much care for the music they have at places like this, but it was better than usual to-night. But I prefer our homely Elberthal concerts—so far as music is concerned. Here one goes to look at the people and the dresses, and to hear the gossip, and very amusing it is. I think you don't go much to the concerts ?'

'No ! I really cannot stand the everlasting waltzes and mazurkas and operatic selections. And one gets so tired of watching the same affected, overdressed women and insipid-looking men engrossed in one another.'

'Yesterday the countess and I were sitting in the gardens, when we saw a man and woman coming along. The woman was dressed most gorgeously, and could scarcely

walk because of her high heels; she hobbled along looking pitiful. He was a tall, strong, robust-looking fellow, and he carried her shawl, and her parasol, and her little bag with her handkerchief and scent-bottle, and he led her little white dog along by a blue ribbon; and he seemed happy.'

Wellfield laughed a little contemptuously.

'I can imagine a man, if he were weak-minded, descending to even that depth, for the sake of some woman,' continued Sara, reflectively. 'What I cannot understand is, that any woman should like him for doing it; should be gratified in seeing him acting the part of a lady's-maid to her. But I have seen many things lately which have puzzled me. Is your sister fond of music?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'You only think so?'

'I hardly know her, you know. She is my half-sister. Once, when she was a mere baby, I saw her; and not again till a month ago—till I came here. Most likely I shall see more of her now. My father has been

instructing me in my duties towards her, and he is perfectly right. If he would but come home and settle down at Wellfield all would be well. It is not good for a girl to live in hotels, with no woman about her whom she really knows, except her maid.'

'No, indeed. But your sister does not look in the least spoiled by that life.'

'Because she is so isolated. She never goes amongst the people at these places; she cannot, because my father himself does not. But it is a dull life for her.'

'How old is she, exactly?'

'A little more than sixteen.'

'You must know, though, that she is very lovely now, and that sometime she will be remarkably beautiful.'

'Avice—will she? She is pale, and her hair—yes, her hair is beautiful, isn't it?'

'Mr. Wellfield! your own sister, whom you see daily, and you ask if her hair is beautiful!'

'Well, it is the fact of her being my own sister, I suppose, whom I see daily, that makes me ask,' said Jerome, calmly. 'I am

not so—forgetful in all cases. But I was going to say that, though I don't in the least know when I shall be free again, yet, when I am free, I am going to Cologne, where I have some musical friends. Cologne is not far from Elberthal, and, if you will allow me, Miss Ford'—he hesitated in a manner which his hearer thought decidely becoming to him—'I should like exceedingly to come over and visit your atelier, if I may—if it is not too great a favour that I ask.'

'Oh no! If you care to see my poor attempts at pictures, I shall be delighted to show you them.'

'I have heard great things of your "poor attempt at pictures," Miss Ford.'

'Have you? Some partial friend——'

'It was Professor Wilhelmi, your master, I think.'

'Yes. Well, he is a very partial friend. He has been goodness itself to me. I should never have done anything without his help. But when you see what he has praised, you can judge for yourself.'

'I am no judge when the work is the work of a friend,' said Jerome, smiling.

'To-morrow they expect at Trockenau a most formidable person—Herr Rudolf Falkenberg.'

'The Frankfort banker?'

'I don't know whether he is a banker or not, though I believe I have heard that he is. The important thing to me is, that he is a great judge of pictures; and that, as he is rich, he can afford to buy them when they please him: but I have heard as well that he is very severe, and most difficult to please.'

'Surely that does not trouble you!'

'It would trouble me if Herr Falkenberg were to see some of my pictures, and pronounce them very bad.'

'As if he would have the ill-breeding to do so!'

Sara laughed.

'I see, you would never make a critic,' she said; and just then, coming to the end of a long walk, they found themselves suddenly in the full blaze of light which illuminated

the linden-planted square where all the little tables stand, at which people sup or dine, or take coffee, wine, or ices. A score of heads and twice as many eyes were quickly turned upon the tall and certainly striking-looking couple who thus advanced into the light.

'Take my arm,' murmured Wellfield; and Sara, dazzled by the light in which they so suddenly found themselves, and a little embarrassed by the amount of attention bestowed upon her and her companion by the well-bred crowd, complied mechanically, and they walked rather quickly through the square.

'I think, if we turn this way, we shall probably find the others,' said Jerome, as they disappeared into the comparative obscurity under the shade of the Kurhaus.

'Very likely,' said Sara, and at that moment Hans Lemde came breathlessly after them.

'Ah, *mein Fräulein*, we thought you were lost!' he said, addressing Sara, and studiously avoiding even looking at her companion. 'The countess is waiting to seek her carriage, for the road to Trockenau is rough.'

'Well, show us the way to where she is, please,' said Sara, with a touch of impatience.

Hans von Lemde walked stiffly in advance, trying rather feebly to look dignified. He was not naturally majestic in demeanour, and the circumstances deprived him of what little scrap of dignity he might in ordinary moments rejoice in. The effect of the procession was that of a noble and his lady preceded by a somewhat weak-minded retainer, new to his duties and afraid of taking too much upon himself.

The Countess of Trockenau was not in the violent hurry which might have been expected from Lemde's representations. She had time again to greet Jerome Wellfield, and to say :

'By-the-bye, Mr. Wellfield, I have a party to-morrow. Will you come ?'

'A very large party ?'

'Oh, *so ziemlich*—quite without ceremony. The ladies come to coffee and remain ; the gentlemen later, to the *Abendbrod* and music.

And a little dancing for the young people, I daresay, and wandering in the garden for those who like it. I shall expect you.'

'If my father is better, or rather if he should be no worse, *gnädige Frau*, I shall have the utmost pleasure,' he said, bowing, while Sara stood a little apart and carefully fastened her glove. The countess turned to speak to some one else, and Wellfield, with a half smile, politely suggested to Sara that perhaps he could button her glove.

'There is your carriage, *gnädige Frau*, going slowly down the road,' exclaimed young Lemde, as if eager to end the scene.

'Call it, then,' said Frau von Trockenau, in much the same tone as that lately used by Miss Ford. It was a tone very generally adopted towards 'poor Lemde.'

Obediently he hurried forward and hailed the coachman of the lady, who was still in lively conversation with a friend.

'The carriage is here, most gracious, by the roadside, waiting!' announced Hans, in a voice growing gradually louder and more por-

tentous; and he repeated the information impressively.

'*Aber, dieser Mensch!*' murmured the 'gracious lady,' as Wellfield advanced, gave her his arm, and led her across the avenue to the roadside, where her carriage was waiting.

Lemde wished very much to offer his arm to Sara, but, looking furtively at her, decided with a sigh not to venture, and turned instead to Emily Leigh, the other English girl, who immediately put her hand within his arm, and tripped after Frau von Trockenau with the utmost cheerfulness. Sara followed, dignified and solitary. It was Jerome Wellfield who handed her into the carriage.

'*Also—bis Morgen!*' said the countess, bowing, and waving her hand as they drove away. Wellfield and Hans Lemde were left alone.

'Are you going to the party to-morrow?' asked Wellfield.

'I? certainly. I go to all Frau von Trockenau's parties.'

'That shows your good taste,' replied Jerome, gravely, raising his hat and wishing

him good-evening; and then, after another look after the carriage as it drove rapidly away down the Nassau Road, he turned and sauntered slowly along the road towards the hotel of the *Vier Jahreszeiten*, where Mr. Wellfield and his family were staying.

CHAPTER II.

FRAU VON TROCKENAU'S 'GESELLSCHAFT.'

THE Count and Countess of Trockenau were both young, rich, and what their countrymen call *lebenslustig*, a word for which we have no equivalent shorter than a well-rounded sentence of explanation.

Their estate was large, and as beautiful as heart could desire. It stood sloping up a rounded, richly-wooded hill in the neighbourhood of K——au; and from its great terrace, as well as from other less distinguished points of vantage, there was a broad and beautiful vista over the rich and many-coloured plain, to where in a silver line the Rhine might be

seen winding his way towards Coblenz. Far distant, like blue clouds on the horizon, lay the soft outlines of the Rhine mountains; far over hill and dale shone the delicious sunshine, while the fair land spread her broad bosom, in the rich maturity of the latter July, to his fervent beams.

All the summer long, Frau von Trockenau loved to have her friends around her, and those friends were various. Coffee-parties and picnics—or rather the German equivalents of picnics in the shape of *fêtes* and *Landparteien*, suppers and dances, riding and driving, and, when it was late enough, shooting and *die Jagd*. An admirable cook, wines of a character not to disgrace the *cuisine*, a hearty welcome, and unlimited liberty to the guest to follow the bent of his own wishes—these were the attractions offered to their guests by the count and countess, and they proved so strong that Frau von Trockenau very rarely had an invitation refused. People refused or put off other visits in order to make one to Schloss Trockenau, and persons who were not

spontaneously invited there schemed to get invitations.

To the initiated reader the remark will be almost superfluous that the practices at Schloss Trockenau must have been characterised by a certain unconventionality and *laisser faire* not always found in German or any other country houses, whether belonging to the nobility or to the *Bürgerschaft*. This was the case, and the guests of the countess were by no means confined to persons who were her equals in rank, many of whom, she was wont to say, might be excellent creatures, but were often old, and, when they lived in the country, were wont to be dull. And dulness was the bane of the countess's existence. In their hatred of it she and her husband were sworn allies; they were never known to oppose one another's schemes for killing time, though it often happened that in their zeal in that cause they would both have provided some entertainment for the same time. When this occurred, the rule was that each should give way in

turn, and this plan was found to answer admirably, and to be productive of the greatest harmony, conjugal and social.

On the evening after that meeting in the *Kurgarten*, a large company, or *Gesellschaft*, was assembled in the rooms, or wandering about the gardens and terraces of the Schloss. It was a mixed and motley society. There were friends of the count, brother officers who were staying in the house, or who had come over from Coblenz for the occasion; young men from Berlin, fashionable or otherwise; some gay cousins of Countess Carla, very stylish young ladies indeed, who, with their pretty cousin as a chaperon, were creating havoc by their accomplishments, and by their airs and graces, in the hearts of all the shy young *Junker* in the vicinity, except in that of Hans von Lemde, who was irresistibly drawn in another direction. There were some young Englishmen from Bonn, fellow-students and friends of the count's younger brother. There were two learned professors, and a poetess whose verses were

fades, and who was rightly and universally voted a bore, but who was amongst the *von*-est of the *vons*, and who distinctly and unmistakably belonged to the *genus irritabile*, and apparently to no other.

There was Jerome Wellfield, who had just arrived, and who was talking to his hostess; there was Herr Rudolf Falkenberg, the great banker and picture-critic, who had arrived that morning. There was a knot of stout, oddly-dressed, *gauche*-looking ladies of a certain age, who clubbed together in a corner, and represented the local nobility and squirearchy.

'No one knows who else may be coming,' said one. 'I think die Trockenau is much too careless. She does not consider the dignity of our position.'

'*Ach, lieber Himmel!* Who is that?' murmured another.

'That' was Sara Ford, who came sweeping down the room with her head in the air, followed by Herr Falkenberg, to whom she talked in her frank, audible, unconstrained

English fashion, and who begged her to come with him to the terrace that he might show her a view which he said ought to be painted.

The pair were followed by the disapproving looks of the local *Junkerthum* before spoken of, and by the round eyes of a number of young German girls, just arrived at that stage in life which is known to their countrymen as the *Backfisch.* Now, a *Backfisch* is a kind of *ingénue* not often met amongst English girls ; and Sara Ford could never, by any chance, have had anything of the genus about her. Consequently she was an object of wonder, and some disapproval to those who either were or had been *Backfische* themselves.

'These English girls!' sighed one of the native nobility, shaking her head portentously. 'If I were to see my Paula monopolise a man in that way—but she is incapable of even speaking to a gentleman before he speaks to her. If a girl of mine were to be like that, I should die.'

'*Gott*, yes!' answered another, intently

watching, while Herr Falkenberg held open the long glass-door, and Sara stepped through it and down the steps on to the terrace. The sun was setting as the young lady and the banker paced towards the point to which he wished to draw her attention. Sara was dressed in black, and there was nothing costly about her attire; for she was not rich, and her only jewellery consisted in certain old rings and a pearl-necklace, which had long ago belonged to her mother when, as the beautiful Marion Fanshawe, she had been married to Sara's father. Plain though the dress was, it set her noble beauty off to great advantage; and one felt—at least Herr Falkenberg felt—the same conscientious delight in looking at her grand, simple loveliness, as results from the contemplation of some fine carved gem of ancient days, found perhaps by accident in the midst of a stock of gaudy modern jewellery.

Sara had never met Herr Falkenberg before. His name was well known to her and to other artists as a judge of almost

unerring taste, and a patron of generous liberality. He was the last of a line of financiers and bankers of princely fortune and passionate devotion to 'the noble pastime of art.' She had felt highly flattered when Frau von Trockenau brought him to her, saying:

'*Liebe* Sara, Herr Falkenberg wishes to be introduced,' after which he had remained beside her chair, speaking of two of her pictures, and discussing them with an admiration, and at the same time a discrimination, which instantly showed her that report had not belied the keenness of his critical powers and the purity of his taste in such matters. 'Perhaps,' thought Sara to herself, repressing a smile of satisfaction, 'if she were very amiable, and listened with attention to his criticisms, he might some day give her an order; and if she could say to friends and fellow-students, "I am painting this for Herr Falkenberg," it would be as good, indeed much better, than fifty laudatory but unprofitable criticisms.'

'See!' said he, as they came to the end of the terrace—and he pointed to the round shoulder of a hill, round the foot of which a bend of the river flowed in a silver curve, while the setting sun gave the most mellow and warm tints to the stretch of the landscape in the background—'that is almost perfect; there is a meaning in the scene—a poetry. Do you not see it?'

'Indeed I do!' she replied; the deep look settling in her eyes, which always visited them when she looked upon grand or beautiful things, and which alone would have made her face a rare one. 'I see it!' she continued; 'and I have studied and sketched it often since I came here, and the result has been despair! I hate myself, and every attempt I make. I don't think landscape is my forte.'

'I don't agree with you. I think you ought to study landscape. I believe, from the examination I have given to those two little pictures of yours, that you might attain high rank as a painter, both of landscape and *genre;* with hard study, of course.'

'Oh, Herr Falkenberg, you are flattering! It is impossible. I often think how presumptuous it is in me to imagine that I shall ever do well in either. Why should I?'

'Why should you not?' he asked, smiling. 'You are ambitious.'

He had seated himself on the arm of a bench at the end of the terrace, and Sara was leaning upon the parapet, her arms folded on the ledge of it; her glorious eyes gazing out upon the feast of colour, of rich calm beauty which lay below. As he uttered the last words, the deep musing look left those eyes; another fire flashed like lightning into them. Her lips parted, the delicate nostril quivered. She raised her head, and looked full at her companion.

'Yes, I am. I am as ambitious as a man —the worse for me, I suppose.'

'I do not say so. How old are you?'

The question was put with a grave, patronising directness which was free from the faintest trace of curiosity or impertinence. She answered it in the same spirit:

'I am twenty-three.'

'Ah! it will be many years, no doubt, before you do anything that will live. It is a toilsome ascent to the high peaks and pure snows of real lasting fame, but it may be accomplished by a single-hearted perseverance.'

He paused, looking at her. The girl felt herself strangely moved, half depressed at the calmness with which he adjudged to her years upon years of future toil, as if from that verdict there could be no appeal, half with a proud elation at the fact that so great a judge should hold it possible that she could ever do anything which would live. His eyes still dwelt upon her face, and hers upon his. He had a good, powerful, and attractive face; dark, massively cut, with keen, shrewd, sarcastic eyes under level dark eyebrows. The small moustache and short pointed brown beard gave great character to this visage, and were two or three shades lighter than the short-cropped hair. He was a man whose age it would be difficult to guess. Sara imagined him to be about forty; he might have been

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any age from thirty to five-and-forty. She had spoken to him, and listened to him entirely as a well-known judge and possible future patron of great power and influence—so she regarded him still. Of what he was or did, how he was regarded outside this, to her, most important capacity, she had not the least idea, and formed none to herself.

'You have a sketch of that bit,' he said at last; 'would you mind letting me see it?'

'Oh! well, if you will promise to regard it merely as a rough attempt, done more because my instinct compelled me to try to reproduce that scene—not as anything that was ever intended for anyone to see but myself,' said Sara, very unwilling to submit so crude an attempt to such critical eyes, and yet not wishing to appear affected.

'If you showed it me, I should judge it entirely on its own merits, of course,' was the composed reply, and Sara felt suddenly, as many other persons often felt in exchanging ideas with Herr Falkenberg, that with him simplicity of nature and conduct reigned

supreme, and that to make excuses and apologies to him was so much trouble lost. Sara wished she had not made that little speech about her sketch, and Falkenberg went on :

'I am staying here a few days, so perhaps to-morrow, before we set off to Lahnburg——'

'Are we going to Lahnburg ?'

'I believe so ; the countess is, at any rate. I have a little country house there, which she was so kind as to say she very much wished to see, and I asked her if she would not make a party and go there with me to-morrow. She said she wanted you to go too, but I don't suppose she will force you there against your will,' he added, smiling.

'It would be anything but against my will. It is a place I have often wished to see.'

'Then I am glad you are going. There may be time for you to give me your sketch to-morrow morning, early, if you will be so kind ; and, as I expect to be in Elberthal during the autumn, may I call at your atelier ?'

'I shall be honoured if you do,' said Sara, her cheeks flushing with pleasure at this mark of favour. 'I only fear that you will leave the said atelier a sadder and a wiser man.'

'As how?'

'As having discovered my attempts to be very poor, commonplace delusions after all.'

'That remains to be seen; all I hope is that you will not be offended if one who, by some misfortune, has got such an inveterate habit of pointing out what appear to him the merits and demerits of any composition, should——'

'That would be of the utmost advantage to me,' said she, gaily, wondering how long the interview was to last, and wondering also, in strict privacy, whether critics—of that eminence—never relaxed into a laugh; whether a sedate smile were all their lips would condescend to.

How long the interview might have lasted it is impossible to say. At that moment it was interrupted. Frau von Trockenau, with

a number of the ingenuous girls before alluded to—whose tender years and inexperience she seemed to find somewhat embarrassing during the 'off season,' before the dancing began—Emily Leigh, Jerome Wellfield, Hans Lemde, and others, came up.

'Oh, Herr Falkenberg!' cried the countess, seeing him, 'a word with you.'

She paused, as did also Jerome Wellfield, and the others went on. Wellfield had not yet spoken to Sara, and while Frau von Trockenau discoursed with much animation to Falkenberg on some point connected with the morrow's excursion, Jerome turned to Miss Ford.

The flush of exultation which her conversation with Falkenberg had aroused, died from her cheeks. She silently put her hand into that of Wellfield, while he, an expression of pleasure dawning in his face, asked her how she did.

After a few minutes, the countess put her hand within Falkenberg's arm, and they went up the terrace, in earnest conversa-

tion. Jerome and Sara were left standing alone.

'Herr Falkenberg is a friend of yours?' asked Wellfield.

'I don't know. I hope he will be. He would be a very valuable friend to me.'

'I can suppose so. Does he wish you to paint this scene?'

'Yes. And it is very beautiful. Do you not think so?'

'It is—lovely. I wish you could see the place my father will not live at—Wellfield Abbey and the country round about. As an artist, you would delight in it.'

'But it is in Lancashire, isn't it?' asked Sara.

'Yes. What then?' inquired he.

'I always fancy it such a black, hideous place. I have only once been in Lancashire, when I passed through Preston with my father on our way to Scotland, years ago.'

'Then you passed not a hundred miles from Wellfield,' he rejoined with some animation. 'But I own, you could not be favourably

impressed with what you saw there. It is not lovely. But Wellfield is.'

'Perhaps I may see it some day—who knows?' said Sara, musingly.

'I am sure I hope you may,' he answered quickly. 'There is nothing I should so much——'

He paused abruptly. Sara felt her face flush, and said quickly:

'Would not you like to come down this side-walk—this ilex walk? The countess has spent a great deal of care and attention upon it, in remembrance of the ilexes of Rome.'

'Ah, the ilexes at Rome! I remember them,' he said, as he followed her into the cool green gloom of the ilex walk, where daylight was dimmed by the intertwining boughs which formed a roof above.

Three quarters of an hour later they returned to the same spot, and found that it was almost dark. The windows of the Schloss blazed with lights, and the music which streamed out on the air said that the dancing had begun.

'What a long time we must have been out!' said Sara, in a dreamy voice. 'They are dancing.'

'So they are. Will you give me this waltz?—it is a waltz, I hear.'

'With pleasure,' said Sara, as they walked towards the house. 'There is to be a cotillon,' she added; 'it is the great thing at these German dances, and Frau von Trockenau has made elaborate arrangements for it.'

'What a pity I don't know how to do it!'

'You should learn,' said Sara.

'There is nothing I should like better if you are at liberty to——' began Jerome, as they entered the room by the long glass-door, just within which stood Lemde, not dancing.

'*Mein Fräulein*,' said the poor youth, humbly coming forward, 'will you honour me by dancing the cotillon with me?'

'How fortunate for me that I secured your promise a moment ago,' said Jerome, with imperturbable composure and a slight smile.

Hans's face fell ; that of Sara crimsoned as she said :

'I am very sorry, Baron Lemde, but I have promised it to Mr. Wellfield.'

In another moment she was waltzing with Jerome Wellfield, and Junker Hans, after watching them for a few moments, turned aside.

'She is too proud and too clever, I suppose, to have anything to do with me,' he was saying to himself, as he struggled with a degrading and childish inclination to cry. 'And those other fellows, Falkenberg, and that Wellfield, and the others, I've no chance against them. It's odd,' the youth continued moodily to reflect, 'how little a lot of these English girls care for rank. Falkenberg is *bürgerlich :* Wellfield—it isn't his rank she cares for ; it's his way, I suppose, of behaving as if he had a right to everything he sees—they don't mind rank when a man has "go," or when he pleases them ; but then they are so hard to please.'

To Sara, the evening passed like a dream.

This was the first, the very first and most delicate flavour and aroma of love, which with her could only be deep and earnest, full and profound, as her own nature. She knew that she was beautiful, without having ever thought much about it. She had seen admiration in men's eyes before now; she had heard words of love and beseeching addressed to her once or twice, and all had lightly passed over her spirit, like a breath of air across a fair garden. But Wellfield's eyes, with their eloquent homage, thrilled her; his mere presence aroused in her the feeling, never known before, of delight, mingled with apprehension; she shrank away from trying to guess, even in her own mind, how much his look meant—what the end of this episode would be. She questioned and doubted, for the first time, her own powers of pleasing, because for the first time she was desirous above all things to please. Advanced spirits may condemn such anxiety as servile and degrading. No opinion is offered upon those points, only the certainty expressed

that such feelings of 'servility' are very common amongst women, and men too, who are in love. Instead of feeling confidence now, she absolutely trembled lest she should have mistaken the meaning of his glance, and of the few words he had now and then dropped, and which had seemed to her to have a deeper meaning than mere phrases of politeness or of compliment.

Such was her deprecatory and tremblingly uncertain state of mind—hers, who had laughed through life, free from tyrant love or care, undaunted by reverses, and holding her own against difficulties with a steadfastness born of innate, inbred courage of soul. Till now every higher thought and aspiration had been resolutely and singly directed towards her art, and her own advancement in it. Her heart's desire had been faithfully, so far as she could, to act up to Goethe's words, and—

> 'Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren
> Resolut zu leben.'

The defeat had been rapid and complete,

and, true to her woman's nature, she rejoiced in it rather than otherwise. At least, this night, in Jerome's presence, and surrounded by the subtle incense of admiration and flattery which he offered her, she rejoiced in it. There were other times, when he was absent, in which the rejoicing was not pure, and the sense of captivity was stronger than the thrill of love.

The evening thus passed on, and every time she met those dark and eloquent eyes she felt, with a throb of the heart, the half-welcome, half-dreaded conviction grow stronger—'This that I see in his eyes is love!'

There ensued a pause in the dancing, organised by Frau von Trockenau, in order to have some music; for she was a woman who utilised all her resources, and never allowed the meanest tool to rust for want of use; and knowing that there were several admirable musicians, vocal and instrumental, in the company, she was firmly resolved that they should display their talents.

A certain young Englishwoman, married to one Count Eugen of Rothenfels, was the first to sing. The fair soprano was filling the room with a flood of melody, when the countess came up to the place where Sara Ford was seated, somewhat apart, with Jerome Wellfield leaning over the back of her chair, his eyes dreamily fixed on the face of the singer.

'Mr. Wellfield,' said his pretty little hostess, 'I know I am asking a very great favour, and that you hate it; but *won't* you sing to-night, to please me?'

'Oh, will you?' said Sara, involuntarily. She had heard wonderful rumours of Wellfield's voice, and the wish to hear him was strong.

He bowed towards the countess.

'To please you, *gnädige Frau*,' he said, with a slight smile, 'is a privilege, and I shall at once obey your order when I receive it.'

'That is good! *recht freundlich!*' exclaimed the lady, radiant with delight; for

Wellfield's reserve was generally as great as his talent was said to be, and she had had little hope of his consenting to sing before that large audience of perfect strangers. She confided her success to the ear of one of her cousins, Helene von Lehnberg, who said, with a sneer:

'Another of your English amateurs, Carla? For my part, I don't think much of a talent that is so haughty and reserved as almost to require one to go on one's knees to it.'

'Ah, my dear Helene! I doat upon proud, haughty people, when they are just the reverse to me, which is the case with Mr. Wellfield,' rejoined Frau von Trockenau, not without malice.

'I am glad you are going to sing,' said Sara to Jerome, when they were alone again.

'I am naturally of an obliging disposition, and could not refuse the Frau Gräfin.'

'She is delighted,' said Sara, with a smile.

'When I have done,' said Wellfield, in a low tone, 'I shall come and ask if you were delighted—may I?'

'May you?' she stammered.

'I mean, will you answer me if I do come?'

'Do you expect me to tell you that I am not delighted?'

'I expect nothing, therefore I am blessed; but I desire very much that you should tell me the truth.'

'I will do so if you wish it.'

'Thank you. . . . Yes, Frau Gräfin, I see and I obey,' he added, as the countess was perceived making her way to him.

There was some little stir and sensation when Wellfield advanced to the piano. 'An Englishman, an amateur—*nun, wir werden 'mal sehen!*' said one or two sceptics, with a supercilious curl of the lip.

'What does he sing? English songs—"The Last Rose of Summer"?' asked one young lady, sarcastically.

'No, no!' whispered a dapper little lieutenant, who was paying her devoted attention; 'he will sing a comic song, "What Jolly Dogs we are!" An Englishman told me last week that they sang nothing else in England now.

He was at a party where nineteen of the company had brought their music——'

'*Gott!* Herr Lieutenant, how horrible!' tittered the young lady.

'And sixteen out of the nineteen had brought "What Jolly Dogs we are!" Fact, I assure you, *parole d'honneur!* But hush! He is playing his own accompaniment. What! Rubinstein! "Asra!" Impossible!'

If so, the impossible was being performed in a masterly manner. Would-be sarcastic lieutenants, tittering young ladies, were bewitched into silence and admiration. Rubinstein's weird and melodious legend of the youth whose race 'die if they love,' was sung to the end, as few of the audience had ever before heard it sung. The last notes, *Die sterben wenn sie lieben*, were followed at first by silence; and then some murmurs, not loud, but deep, of applause, greeted the singer.

The song that followed was, *Es blinkt der Thau*, and it made Sara's heart beat. That finished, as if to give his audience a complete

change, he struck a couple of deep chords, and began to sing that oft-quoted, hackneyed, but ever-beautiful *Ich grolle nicht.*

Sara felt a slight shiver run through her. Why did he choose that one weird song of Heine's, set to Schumann's equally weird music? She had heard it once at a concert, sung in a style which hardly rose above mediocrity, and yet even then it had impressed her; and she had pondered involuntarily over the gruesome, hinted mystery of the last lines. Jerome sang the strange song with a depth and a meaning all his own: her artist-nature thrilled to the strains, which are in very truth a song of death; it was ghostly—it was as if her spirit was enfeebled and chilled, and had to trail its drooping wings through a land full of vague and awful shadows.

'Ich sah die Nacht
In deines Herzensraume;
Ich sah die Schlang'
Die dir am Herzen frisst—
Ich sah, mein' Lieb',
Wie sehr du elend bist!
Ich grolle nicht.'

There was a pause as he finished this song. Jerome half-rose from the piano, but a voice cried from the window:

'We have not had the test yet, Mr. Wellfield. Give us a love-song. Give us *Adeläida*.'

Sara saw, even from her place in the background, the expression that flashed into the young man's eyes, and over his face.

'Good!' was all he said, as he sat down again, and that melodious, significant single *F* was struck—that note which is the prelude to the sea of love and fire and passion which follows.

Sara sat pale and composed in her place, but feeling as if everyone in the room must see and observe that she was blushing furiously—so burningly hot were her cheeks. Each time that the notes 'Adeläida' rang out, she felt that she was apostrophised—the company, and the lighted room oppressed her—yet she looked, to one who was observing her from the other side of the room, grave, quiet, almost tired.

When the last notes had died away, Wellfield rose very decidedly, nor could he be prevailed upon to sing another note. The company clustered round him, thanked him, and congratulated him; asked to be introduced to him, and dispersed. Dancing began again, and still Sara sat as if spell-bound, in the place where he had left her.

'I have come to know if you approved?' murmured Jerome's voice beside her.

She looked up, and met his eyes with an expression in them, before which her own in vain tried to remain calm and untroubled.

'If I approved?' she said, indistinctly. 'How can you ask?'

Jerome was leaning against the wall, looking down at her—looking, too, as undisturbed as if he had been asking her whether she would have an ice. In the same manner, with the same tone, so low that none but she could hear it, he added:

'And did you understand?'

'I—I think so,' said Sara, faintly.

'Herr Wellfield, Miss Ford! the cotillon is about to begin. Here is your favour, Mr. Wellfield. Be good enough to let me pin it on, and then go and find your partner.'

It was Fräulein von Lehnberg, one of the countess's Berlin cousins, who spoke, with some impatience in her voice; for she had twice addressed Jerome, and he had taken no notice of her. He stepped forward now, and held the basket of ribbons while she pinned on his favour, with an imperturbable severity of gravity which irritated the young lady exceedingly. Then he offered Sara his arm, and they advanced to meet the rest of the company.

In the discussions next day on the subject, it was universally decided that Mr. Wellfield might be a musical, Miss Ford an artistic prodigy; but that in the matter of dancing a cotillon they both displayed to the full that insular stiffness characteristic of their nation. That little Emily Leigh had ten times the spirit of her taller and handsomer countrywoman. How gracefully she danced, and

contrived to make even that maypole, Hans Lemde, look almost graceful too.

Beloved and candid discussions of the day after! How much does not society and the individual owe to you, in the matter of establishment of the facts, and an exhaustive analysis of the motives actuating the behaviour of those who come before your tribunal! May nothing ever occur to make you less vigorous or less rigorous than you are at this day!

CHAPTER III.

A LANDPARTEI.

ON the following morning, Sara came into the room where Falkenberg was standing alone, waiting for the rest of the company who were going to Lahnburg. In her hand she carried a small canvas.

'Here, Herr Falkenberg, is the sketch you wished to see. I remembered it, and brought it downstairs with me.'

Falkenberg thanked her, took the sketch, and looked at it in silence, until Sara said:

'It is as I expected. You are racking your brains to find out how to say "Atrocious" so that it shall sound like something else.'

'If I had to say "Atrocious," I'm afraid I should say it, much though I might dislike having to do so,' he answered, smiling. 'As it is, I wish to say nothing of the kind.'

'Oh, what a relief!'

'There are the carriages coming round,' he added composedly, 'to take us to the Ems railway station. May I take the sketch to my own room? There is no time to look at it now.'

'Certainly, if you care to do so.'

'Thank you,' said he, taking it up, and leaving the room with it.

Sara sat down at the piano, and played tunes, until at last Frau von Trockenau came whirling into the room with a pair of long gloves in her hand.

'Are you ready, Sara? Yes—of course. How horrid of you! You never keep the company waiting. What a rush it is, this life! Oh, how I long to be alone sometimes!'

'Complimentary to us and to poor Count Trockenau!'

The countess laughed heartily.

'My poor Fritz!—of course I spoke exceptionally.'

'You know you would hate to be alone,' added Sara. 'You cannot live out of a rush. I wonder what you would do if you had to lead my life at Elberthal.'

'Ah, but you have a great soul. Mine is such a very little one. Little in every way. It is so small that it has led me to—what do you think?'

'I am sure I cannot say. To tell Hans Lemde that I am dying to paint his portrait, I dare say.'

'No! But oh, what a lovely idea! I will tell him so, and I will say that you said it. Poor Hans! I imagine him sitting to you. Oh, I think I see his face!'

They both laughed in a manner which Baron Lemde would probably think malignant, and Frau von Trockenau went on.

'No, but I was so annoyed at the way in which Helene and Maria Lehnberg behaved last evening—giving themselves such airs,

that I have done something spiteful to them to-day.'

'Shameful! But what is it?'

'I have doomed them to drive with me and Lemde in the barouche; Fritz rides, and I am sending you first in the pony-phaeton with Herr Falkenberg.'

'I see nothing so very spiteful in that. Why should your cousins object?'

'My dear Sara! I believe you live in a dream. Don't you know that Helene Lehnberg would give her right hand if Falk—— Oh, here he is. Good-morning, Herr Falkenberg. I shall not be a moment. How beautifully you are dressed, Sara! Beside you, I feel like a collection of tags of coloured ribbon. You are both ready. Well, shall we go? Herr Falkenberg, I am going to ask you to drive Miss Ford to the station in the pony-phaeton. Herr von Lemde will go with my cousins and me.'

'I shall be delighted,' observed Herr Falkenberg; and Sara followed the countess out of the room, lost in wonder as to what she

meant by saying that she had done something spiteful to her cousins, and what it was Helene Lehnberg would give her right hand for.

Very soon she was seated beside Falkenberg, and they were driving down the hill, along the Nassau Road to Ems, which was reached before long; past the hotel of the *Vier Jahreszeiten*, to the station.

* * * * * *

There is a wayside railway station on a German line, which station, twenty years ago, was a thing of the future, and which I will here call Lahnburg. It is the scene of the *Leiden des jungen Werther*—it is the place where Goethe adored, and where the object of his adoration placidly 'went on cutting bread and butter.' It was then Goethe's, Lotte's, Jerusalem's home; now it is an out-of-the-way country town which is completely out of the beaten route of the tourist, and which few persons have heard of, and fewer still care to visit.

Leave the train—it is a slow one—all the trains are slow which deign to stop at Lahn-

burg. At Lahnburg they hurry no one—themselves least of all. Now we are on the asphalted platform of the little station, in the presence of a Prussian, with a blue coat and a fierce moustache, who sternly demands our *Gepäckschein.* If we have luggage, we meekly give it him, thankful to be so well, if so severely taken care of. If we have none, we mention the fact, and leave him to wonder what sinister motives could have brought us to that spot, and to look at us as if he would place us under arrest, were not his powers so shamefully limited. We leave the station, and take the road leading towards the town.

Along an uninteresting country-road, till we begin to drive up the hill around and upon which the town is built. Up the steep, rugged streets, between the high antique houses, slowly and joltingly lumbering over the stones, in and out, and round about up the hill, till we arrive at the Marktplatz, and behold, surrounding the great cobble-stoned square, all the principal buildings of the town! Pause, Jehu! thou reckless charioteer—pause,

that we may fully take into our minds the scene about us. Here we are, in the middle of the square. There, opposite to us, stands the solemn old *Dom*, built of a warmly-hued, reddish stone. From its midst rises the nucleus of it all—that which is older than Christianity, the seamed, cracked, scarred, black, old *Heidenthurm*—the 'heathen-tower,' remnant of long-past Roman rule. Blasted, black and ruined, but grim and defiant, majestic and undegraded still, in the midst of its wreck, it fronts us, and towers over the town and landscape beneath; for the *Dom* is built on the very summit of the hill; and before it was, was the *Heidenthurm*. It watches over the fertile hill-slopes and over the level, poplar-fringed meads at the foot of them, between which the gliding Lahn holds its course. Since that grim old sentinel first took his stand there, what changes have not taken place! The very face of the landscape has altered, while dynasties changed and kings and people rose and fell, and kingdoms and empires flourished and passed

away. Varied have been the signs of the heavens above him—more varied far the life-stories, the joys, the sorrows, the raptures, and the agonies of the races which have grown up, have lived and died, married and brought children into the world—while he stood there defiant and unchangeably grim.

There on the right hand of the square is a more modern safety-guard, and one more in consonance with the advanced civilisation which has arisen since the *Heidenthurm* was built. This latter guardian is the *Wachtstube*, *Wache*, *Hauptwache*, as it is indiscriminately called—the guardhouse, peopled with half a dozen scrubby-looking soldiers, and a couple of lieutenants, with a white mongrel cur, alternately their plaything and their victim during the weary hours of ennui. The *Heidenthurm* turns its back upon this outcome of a high civilisation and the Christian religion—what has it in common with the *Wachtstube*, or the *Wachtstube* with it? To the left, more houses: that big clumsy building with the Prussian eagle over the doorway is the *Rath-*

haus; therein the Herr Bürgermeister and his belongings live and move and have their being. Filling in the gaps more and more houses, each one a picture, each roof a distracting medley of hills and dales, ups and downs, dormer windows, turrets, chimney-stacks whose irregularity would break the heart of a high-minded architect of modern suburban villas. And here too, last but not least, for those who want accommodation, with mine host bowing and smiling before the door, is that lumbering old structure, the inn of the place—the *Gasthof zum Herzoglichen Hause*, a building bearing some inexplicable, indefinable, but most indubitable resemblance to Noah's ark, as pictured to the popular imagination in the toyshop windows.

Our party had proceeded thus far—that is, to the market square—on their way from the station. The countess and one of her cousins only had taken seats in the carriage which had met them. The men, Sara Ford, and the other Fräulein von Lehnberg had walked. The German ladies went into raptures over

the place; it was *reizend*, *entzückend*, and many other superlative expressions of admiration. Sara asked Falkenberg aside:

'Is it impossible to go into the old *Dom* and explore Lotte Buff's house, and these other quaint old places?'

'It is, on the contrary, very possible, *mein Fräulein*. But,' he added in a lower tone, 'would you care to go with all these people?'

Sara shrugged her shoulders, smiling a little.

'I see you would not. I will arrange that you have a good view of whatever you wish to see. Meantime, suppose we go on to my house, where lunch will be ready for us, I expect.'

'I wonder,' thought Sara within herself, 'whether his wife and family are away from home, or whether his wife is just a slave and a *Hausfrau*, as so many of them appear to be.'

The carriage was now driven past the *Hauptwache*, up a street leading out of a corner of the square, on to a breezy upland

road, from which there was a fine view over the level fields far below to the left, while on the right there were pleasant-looking fir-clad hills, over which a bracing breeze blew.

Herr Falkenberg's 'summer-house' was situated not very far up the said road; it was an old grey grange, standing on a slope at the right hand, surrounded on three sides by what had been a moat, and it was over the remains of a drawbridge that the carriage drove into the grounds. Sara lingered a moment before the grey moss-grown stone archway, trying to make out a half-defaced inscription above it. Herr Falkenberg lingered too, and said:

'You cannot read that, Miss Ford. I own that it was one of the great attractions of the place to me when I bought it.'

'What is it?' she asked. 'I cannot see.'

'First there are the initials of the builder, R. K., which stand, I believe, for Rodolf Kammermann; and then, beneath the date, 1560; and on either side, still easily to be read, *Mein Genügen.* I thought it was a good omen for happiness.'

'Yes, indeed. And is that the name of the place?'

'Yes. It is called to this day *Mein Genügen*.' *

'I like it,' said Sara, musingly. 'That old baron, or whatever he was, must have had poetry in his soul.'

'Yes; poetry which he succeeded in expressing simply and beautifully, in this old house with the lovely view,' said Falkenberg, as they followed the others, overtaking them at the door.

From the door-steps there certainly was a very fair prospect—an uninterrupted view to the river in the vale below, and to the hills on the opposite side of it. To the left could just be seen some of the roofs of the town, showing that *Mein Genügen* was not utterly alone in the world, and the higher red turrets of the *Dom*, and the ragged top of the *Heidenthurm*.

'Not the *Wachtstube*, fortunately,' remarked Sara.

* *Mein Genügen*—'my content,' or 'my delight.'

'Luckily not,' rejoined Falkenberg.

More bursts of delight from the ladies—rushes into the house, into the garden, everywhere. A courteous invitation from the host to enter, and lay aside their outdoor things and rest, until lunch should be ready. Which invitation was complied with. An entrance into the house, and more admiration, for the salon was a quaint and charming room, full of quaint, charming, and costly things.

'He must be alone, I suppose,' Sara decided within herself, as no lady came forward, and Herr Falkenberg continued himself to do the honours with an ease of manner and an apparent simplicity which exquisitely concealed the perfect tact he employed.

He contrived—for he had that special gift so rarely found—to make each separate person there to feel him or herself to be 'the honoured guest' *par excellence;* and he succeeded at least in delighting two of his visitors, Frau von Trockenau and Sara Ford. The two Fräulein von Lehnberg were rather more difficult. They were annoyed that

there was only Hans von Lemde to be monopolised.

They stood in the window, talking with him and Graf von Trockenau, who was trying to recall the particulars of some place in the neighbourhood 'which everyone ought to see,' and in this endeavour he was feebly and ineffectually seconded by Hans von Lemde, whose profound studies in such literature as the *Almanach de Gotha* had apparently disqualified him for more commonplace topics. Sara had seated herself beside a curious old painted spinet which stood at one side of the room. Frau von Trockenau was beside her, and Falkenberg was leaning on the aforesaid spinet talking to them, or rather listening while the countess talked to him.

'It is a paradise of a place, Herr Falkenberg. There is nothing I should like better than to have such a place—only a week of it would be enough for me, because it is too small to have a large party in. It would be dull beyond expression after seven days, and you see my husband is not a financier—the

very reverse, poor fellow!—so he could not afford to indulge me with such a toy for one week in the year.'

'I spend a good deal more than one week in the year here, *gnädige Frau*——'

'Ah, yes; but you have a great soul, like Miss Ford. I was telling her so this morning. You can exist without company and distractions.'

'Perhaps Herr Falkenberg does not care for visitors,' suggested Sara, utterly unconscious of committing any solecism. 'Perhaps the society of his wife and family is sufficient for him.'

'Sara!' ejaculated the countess; and then, as if much entertained, the pretty little lady tried to stifle a laugh which would not be altogether repressed. Into Falkenberg's eyes leaped a strange, disappointed expression; and at that moment they met those of Sara, who was looking up at him, surprised at his manner and at that of her friend. The man's colour rose, and he laughed too, a little unsteadily, as he replied:

'I am not so fortunate as Miss Ford imagines. I have neither wife nor child.'

'No wife!' echoed Sara, in astonishment; and then, laughing too, but with a heightened colour, she said:

'I am sure I beg your pardon. I don't know what made me take it for granted that you were married. No one ever told me so. It was stupid of me.'

'I do not see why you should think so,' he answered, trying to laugh in his turn; but there was a tinge of constraint in the laugh, and by some means his eyes met those of the Countess of Trockenau. She appeared to be laughing still, a little; her handkerchief before her mouth, but it was not all a laugh in the glance that met his. Countess Carla had indeed a most active brain, if one somewhat lacking in consequence, and failing in the matter of logic. The thought which then darted through her mind was, 'Falkenberg is much struck with Sara Ford. He does not like to find that she has all along thought he was married and done for; and

that, therefore, she can never have bestowed one tender thought upon him. And it is a shame, too. I believe they are made for one another, and I do like him so much. Why should it not be? I like the idea.'

She ceased to laugh entirely. She rose, placed her arm within his, and asked him to tell her about a picture at the opposite side of the room.

They walked away. Sara was left, with her elbow resting on the top of the painted spinet, thinking:

'Not married? how odd! But why should I have supposed he was? I suppose that was what Carla meant, when she said she had been spiteful to the Lehnbergs—she said Helene Lehnberg would give her right hand—oh, that was too bad! He is immensely rich, if not noble. Yes, I see it all now . . . and certainly he is far too good for that vain, boastful coquette.'

When lunch was announced they went into the dining-room, and the repast was in no way calculated to throw discredit on the man-

agement of the occasional summer residence of a rich Frankfort banker, or upon the presence of mind and mental powers of his housekeeper. Sara found herself seated at one side of her host, while Countess Carla was opposite ; while Fräulein von Lehnberg, drawing her black brows together, wondered on what known or unknown principle of etiquette that Englishwoman was given a higher place than herself. But Herr Falkenberg was most distinctly not only host but master in his own house, and when he had placed a chair for Helene and asked her to take a certain place, she had perforce consented. Sara did not bestow much attention upon the order of precedence ; but her interest had been roused in her host, and she saw from a certain beaming look on Countess Carla's face that she was thoroughly well-pleased with everything, and with herself in particular. In consequence of this, she seconded all Falkenberg's efforts at conversation, and the meal was passing off brightly enough. Sara observed her host more closely, and the more

she observed him the better she liked him. By the time that lunch was half over, she had forgotten that he was a great critic, who had got a sketch of hers upon which he was going to pass judgment: this point disappeared in her growing appreciation of his qualities as a man and a companion. His perfect modesty in the midst of his wealth and great surroundings struck her more than anything else. Sara loved to see power in man or woman; but assumption she hated with a hatred that was almost ludicrous.

Just at this time the door opened, and a fresh-looking young gentleman entered, started on seeing so many guests, and was about to back out again; but Falkenberg sprang up, saying:

'*Willkommen!* you thought I was alone, I expect. Come in and join us.'

With which he introduced him as Baron Arthur Eckberg, to the two Berlin ladies in particular. He was awarded a seat between them. Helene's black brows relaxed in their frown. Presently her voice was heard in

dulcet tones. She was appeased; and the countess became more radiant than ever.

When the party again repaired to the salon, a rather confused conversation ensued. It was found that three hours remained to be disposed of, before it would be time to return to the railway station. Herr Falkenberg, with a courteous patience which was beautiful to behold, tried to find out what his lady-guests, to use an ancient phrase, 'would be at.' This was rather a difficult task, as the Lehnberg sisters displayed emphatically 'a diversity of gifts, but the same spirit,'—the gifts, namely, of caprice, contrariety, and perverseness, and the same spirit of cool self-seeking and resolution that all should give way to them. Some one appealed to Sara.

'Thank you,' said she, holding up a little sketching-board, 'the present professional opportunity is too good to be missed. I am going to sketch the *Dom*, if my going out alone will not be thought rude. I can find my way to the Market Square, and I will come back here in plenty of time, so I beg

that no one will be in any trouble about me.'

'Don't go far away from here, as I may join you later, *when* the others have made up their minds,' said the countess, in the blandest of voices.

'Very well,' said Sara, smiling, and, with a slight salute to the rest of the company, she took her way out of the house. Falkenberg had not said a word either for or against her resolution to go out alone.

She left the garden, pausing once again to contemplate with a peculiar pleasure the old grey gateway, and to read over the inscription, which seemed now to have a new meaning for her.

'*Mein Genügen*,' she thought. 'Yes, I should fancy that that man would make a "contentment" wherever he goes. There is the harmony of a strong soul at peace with itself and the world, in all he says and does. But I wonder he is not married. I could imagine some woman being very much in love with him; and if he loved her, he would

most assuredly make her happy. Well, Carla says that with the exception of her husband and herself, the nicest people are not married.'

She smiled as she remembered that saying, and, looking up, found herself again in the centre of the Marktplatz, which was empty of all human life.

The afternoon was hot, and the sun shone bakingly upon the round stones which paved the square. A drowsy calm hung over everything. Sara, pausing, looked around her, trying to choose some vantage-ground from which to sketch the *Dom.* She perceived that to the left of it, immediately under its wall, there were steps leading into a kind of small retired square, which looked shady and cool. Not a good position from which to make her sketch, but it was inviting. The ardour for work had left her. Ever since last night she had been longing intensely to be alone. She bent her steps towards the spot, ascended the low, broad flight of stone stairs, and found herself in a square, shady,

gravelled space, in the midst of which rose a heavy, tasteless-looking stone monument, something between an ambitious tombstone and a grovelling obelisk. She walked up to it and looked at it. It bore a long list of names, and an inscription to the effect that the town of Lahnburg raised this humble *Denkmal* to the memory of those of her sons who had died fighting for *Kaiser und Vaterland*, in 1870-71. There were the regiments to which the deceased had belonged, their ages, and the names of the engagements in which they had fallen—Sedan, Metz, Saarbrück, etc. And below all, *Auf Wiedersehen!* Sara read it all, strangely moved by its homely simplicity, the confident expression of belief in a meeting again, and touched by the profound peace of this quiet *Ruheplatz*—so fitting for those brave hearts. At one side of the square there was a low wall, and some seats before it, on one of which she seated herself, and found that it commanded a glorious view of the low-lying country through which there the Lahn flows. The great, cool

shadow of the cathedral was cast over her, while beneath her eyes the fertile land lay spread under a quivering veil of golden sun-pierced mist.

It was a feast for eye and heart. The artist soul of the woman drank in all the broad, calm, peaceful beauty of it, and her eyes dwelt lovingly upon every exquisite curve of distant hill, on every silver link in the windings of the placid river. She put her hand upon her sketch-book—opened it ; even took her pencil in her hand ; then laid it down again, with a restless sigh breaking from her lips. She felt the need of being alone, and yet, now that she was alone, she dreaded to acknowledge her own state of mind to herself. Her thoughts were vague and disconnected. There was a prevailing sensation that the old life no longer satisfied her. She knew that between her and her rejoicing fulness of contentment in her art, a barrier had arisen. A third thought now always intruded between herself and her purpose. She could handle no pencil, take up

no book, behold no beautiful thing, form no plans for the future, without the influence of Jerome Wellfield making itself overpoweringly felt. At times—at this moment, even—she almost resented this new feeling; longed for freedom, and revolted at finding her soul enslaved. She felt a tremor sometimes—the unspoken question tormented her, 'What if this passion be all wrong, instead of all right? What if it paralyse, instead of expanding, my nature? If it so absorb me that I can forget others—forget, for one moment, my highest aims—then it is surely wrong. A love that is pure and true ought to make one more unselfish, ought to make one love better and more largely and liberally everything and every person about one. Is it so with me?'

Some such thought as this was agitating her mind this afternoon. She was striving to be reasonable, to keep her head steady in the midst of her heart's wild storm—piteously striving, while the tyrant sentiment shook her with ruthless hand; while between her and

the wholesome outside nature, came the beautiful face which now haunted her thoughts so doggedly, and beyond the twitter of the hopping birds about and above her, sounded that voice to which every fibre had thrilled, every sense had responded, last night. A lark suddenly rose, fluttering aloft, pouring out a full-hearted song—such a flood of trilling ecstasy as must have nearly burst his little throat. She heard it, and it troubled her ; it interrupted the memory of that other song, in such weird contrast to this one, which Jerome had sung :

'In dreams I saw thy face,
And saw the night
Filling thy heart's drear space,
And saw the snake
That gnaws that heart apace.
I saw, my love,
Thy great and sore distress ;
I murmur not.'

'What am I thinking of?' she almost uttered, starting quickly. 'I am nervous. I must be. Why didn't I go to those Lehnberg girls and be amiable to them, instead of stand-

ing aloof and helping Carla to be ill-natured, for I know she dislikes them. I should have felt better now, had I done so. I am degraded by indulging in this folly, and I——'

'Surely, Miss Ford, you did not think this the best place from which to sketch the *Dom?*' said Falkenberg's voice, just beside her.

Sara turned slowly, too thoroughly absorbed in her own thoughts to be startled. Her eyes dwelt at first almost unrecognisingly upon his face. There was trouble in them—a kind of pained, hunted look. Gradually they cleared, as she came down again into the world of reality, and saw him stooping towards her. He was alone. Her troubled heart grew calmer, as she saw his good face, and grave, critical brown eyes, full of wisdom and full of kindness, fixed upon her.

'Whatever this man told me, I should believe implicitly,' she thought within herself, and she smiled welcome to him. Indeed, she did welcome him in her heart. He came as a deliverer. Her thraldom had begun to gall her, when he appeared.

'Where have you left the countess?' she asked.

'At my house. She discovered that she could not walk so far as the others were going, and that she wished to inspect my house and farm and gardens; for she was certain that she could find a great deal to improve in all of them.'

He smiled, and so did Sara, the latter of course being unconscious of the additional remarks made by the candid countess when alone with her favourite guest—remarks which it had required all his tact to receive with an appearance of amused indifference.

'Ah, she is not fond of walking. You may well ask if I thought this a good place from which to sketch the *Dom*. I came down here, and then found that I was not inclined to draw. I hope you do not feel that you have been beguiled here on false pretences.'

'By no means. I am glad you don't wish to draw; perhaps you will be all the more disposed to converse.'

'If you will "introduce a subject," as they did in the old game, I shall be delighted.'

'I have a subject quite ready. I hope you will not think me very impertinent for introducing it; and if you consider my questions unwarrantable, tell me so, and I will apologise and be silent.'

'Now I know you are going to ask me questions about myself, which I give you free leave to do. I know of absolutely nothing in my life which I care to conceal.'

'Then, do you live entirely at Elberthal?'

'I have lived there now for two years, entirely, except when friends have invited me to visit them.'

'And alone?'

'Alone, except for my old servant, Ellen, my second mother, who lives with me.'

'And you have neither father nor mother?' he asked.

'No! My mother died when I was a baby, almost. My father worshipped her. He never married a second time. Nearly three years ago he also died. I have very

few relations, and those not congenial. I may therefore say, I am alone in the world.'

'And—and—excuse the question,' he said, flushing violently, so that she looked at him in surprise. 'Are you—but really, I have no right to ask.'

'What do you mean, Herr Falkenberg?'

'I wondered whether you were entirely dependent on your art, for——'

'Oh, I thought you were going to ask, like my aunt in England, what I did when I was asked out, and had no chaperon to take me,' said Sara, laughing. 'Am I dependent on my art for the means of subsistence? No! I have just one hundred pounds a year of my own, Herr Falkenberg, safe and secure.'

'I am glad of that,' said he, with a sympathetic smile of relief. 'It makes all the difference. With that income certain, you may live to your art as art.'

'Yes, I find it a very good thing. My hundred a year is worth a thousand to me, I assure you. But what a paltry little sum it must appear to you,' she added, with a look

of humour in her grey eyes. 'What was it I once read about "spinsters and widows of one or two hundred a year, and other minute capitalists of the same kind?" I remember being very much amused with it. Do you not almost feel to require a magnifying-glass—mental, I mean—to enable you to see my hundred a year at all—you with your immense transactions, and your great income?'

'My dear Miss Ford,' he expostulated, blushing as if to apologise for having such a large income when she had such a very small one, 'pardon me; I ought never to have alluded——'

Sara laughed with hearty enjoyment.

'Do not look so distressed,' she said. 'When I think how frightened I was at the countess's account of you, and how I quaked when I saw her bringing you up to me yesterday, and then realise your goodness—why should you not ask how much money I have, and why should I not tell you that I have a hundred a year? I think there is such an

immense amount of false delicacy wasted upon such matters.'

"Yet I know that you would not think of asking me what my income is,' said Falkenberg, composedly.

'There is a difference between a great financier and a "minute capitalist" like myself. Have you some plan for turning my hundred a year into two?' she added, laughing.

'No; I was innocent of wishing to speculate with your money. I was only anxious to know that you were not obliged to speculate with your brains.'

'No; I have been most fortunate, I consider, in that respect. When I first went to Elberthal I was certainly seriously puzzled to arrange my affairs, from a poverty of means, not an *embarras de richesses.* You see—I daresay you can bend your comprehension to the fact—it *was* a little difficult to make a hundred a year pay for board and lodging for two, and for my lessons as well.'

'It must have been impossible,' exclaimed

Falkenberg, looking so shocked that Sara laughed again gleefully.

'I am sure I could "harrow you up," as the Americans say, if I were to relate some of Ellen's and my contrivances at that time. We both were inspired with a Spartan resolution not to get into debt if we had to starve for it.'

'I cannot conceive how you lived,' he said, in a voice which had actual pain in it. 'How can you laugh at it? It is shocking. What were your friends doing to allow——'

'Oh! my friends were few, and they were all so angry at the course I had taken, that they would have rejoiced in the idea that I was being humbled—that perhaps I should be obliged to return home. But I was going to tell you how we went on—if you want to hear, that is.'

'Oh, if you will be so good as to tell me!'

'I had lessons from Wilhelmi; I daresay you know him?'

'Yes.'

'He is a splendid fellow, do you know?

At first I had great difficulty in getting him to teach me at all. Then he suddenly became quite kind. I believe it was as soon as he saw that I meant work, and not nonsense. He was good enough to say that I had talent, and since then he will accept absolutely nothing from me for my lessons. He says I can give him a service of plate, with inscriptions, when I am a popular painter. Is not that noble generosity ?'

'Very kind,' assented Falkenberg, almost coldly.

'And his wife and daughter have been almost as kind as himself. I feel that they are friends indeed.'

'But your people at home ?' he began.

'All my "people at home" consist in an uncle, a brother of my mother's, and his family. My father was professor of modern history at —— College, in London. His opinions, both religious and social, were advanced. When he was living, his house was a favourite place with clever, cultivated men and women, of all shades of opinion ; most

of them, like himself, not particularly well off. Then he died, suddenly, and left me, as I said, with one hundred pounds a year. I was just one-and-twenty, and my small possessions were fortunately absolutely at my own disposal. I tried living with "my people at home." My uncle is a clergyman; rector of a very small village in the south of England. They exist there; they don't live. It soon grew intolerable to me. I had been accustomed to the society of men and women of mind; and the gossip about the curate, and my cousins' frantic efforts to imitate the dress of the county ladies who occasionally came to church, and who most likely spent as many hundreds on their clothes as Charlotte and Louisa had sovereigns, drove me almost wild. Then the curate tried to convert me——'

'Heavens!'

'And I spoke disrespectfully of the Church. My aunt and cousins were speechless, and sent me to Coventry for a long time. I remembered how well my pictures had sold at

some fancy fairs and bazaars in London, to which I had sometimes contributed, and I resolved that I would use the powers God had given me. I laid all my plans in silence, only taking my old Ellen into my confidence. She vowed she would follow me to the world's end.'

'Of course!'

'Of course? Not at all. She had an excellent situation offered her, as housekeeper, in an English country house, where she could have done as she pleased, and where she also would have received a hundred a year. When incomes dwindle down to hundreds, Herr Falkenberg, one finds one's-self on a pecuniary level with strange companions sometimes.'

'How you harp upon that stupid hundred pounds!' exclaimed Falkenberg. 'I believe you wish to defy me with it. Well?'

'She gave it up, and accompanied me. There was a storm at the rectory when I unfolded my plans. My uncle forbade me to go, and said it would have broken my

mother's heart.' Her lip curled scornfully. 'My mother, who always taught me that no kind of work was shameful, and that every kind of idleness was! Naturally I took no notice of that. My cousins said I was a Bohemian, and liked adventures, and that it all came of my having been brought up amongst unbelievers. My aunt was speechless for a time, and then said, "Go abroad, child, alone! What will you do for a chaperon, when you are invited anywhere?"'

'And you?' he asked, laughing.

'I said, "I suppose I shall go without one." And then I came to Elberthal. I have been there now for two years. One of my cousins occasionally writes to me, and I to her. The rest ignore me. And I—have learnt to live alone. With plenty of work it is not so very difficult, and the depraved nature of the German customs has even allowed me to go out without a chaperon now and then, without visiting the sin too severely upon me.'

'Then how did you meet with the Trockenaus?'

'Ah!' said Sara, a smile of pleasure flashing over her face, 'that was another pleasant thing. Count Trockenau was once a student in the very college in which my father was professor of history, and had attended some of his lectures; and, it seems, had been at his house, and seen me when I was a mere child. I don't remember it, but he does. They saw a picture with my name, at an exhibition in Berlin; and he actually took the trouble to ascertain whether I had anything to do with the Professor Ford he had known. That is a year ago; since then, they have been unvaryingly kind to me. But people are kind, it seems to me. As for Countess Carla—she is goodness itself.'

'Yes; there is a wonderful charm about her,' he said, and then they were both silent for a time.

Her clear grey eyes were fixed upon the fields below them—eyes so perfectly true, pure, and candid, he thought he had never seen. Now also, he saw the slight line about the mouth—a line which was sometimes a

little hard, as if struggle and disillusionism had called it there. Her open gaze, her fearless smile, her unembarrassed manner of holding her way through the world—what was it all? Innocence, most assuredly; but ignorance—no. She knew the world, and knew that it was evil. He thought that in addition to innocence there was perfect comprehension of her position, great ambition, a great deal of pride, and, mixed with that, a touch of indifference that was almost cynical. She did not sneer; there was no sneer on the beautiful frank mouth, but there was disdain. He had never seen anything quite like her before. As he sat, looking earnestly at her, he began to reflect that very soon she would pass from his life. This conversation in the afternoon sunshine, under the shadow of the *Dom*, was pleasant — as sweet as it was unexpected, and different from all other conversations he had ever had. But soon it would be over. After a few days at Trockenau, she would return to her atelier; he to his business and his—pleasures. His plea-

sures, as he looked back upon them now, seen in the light of *this* sun, looked grey and dim and poor. Of course he need not lose sight of her, and the most natural way of keeping her in view, considering their relative positions, would be to give her a commission to paint him a picture. He felt himself revolted at the idea—felt the blood rise to his cheeks at the thought. Surely there must be some other way of keeping her in sight.

At this moment she turned, and found his eyes so intently fixed on her face, that her colour too rose a little, as she asked:

'Have I said something that shocks you too, Herr Falkenberg? I should be sorry for that.'

'Miss Ford!' he exclaimed earnestly, 'what you have told me makes me honour and respect you from my very soul. Do not for a moment think that your confidence has been misplaced, as it must have been if I were "shocked" at anything you have said. We only met yesterday, and yet I am bold enough to say that if you would consent to

place me on the list of your friends and servants, I should indeed feel honoured.'

Sara looked at him with eloquent eyes and parted lips.

'You are very kind,' she said earnestly, 'and I accept your kindness. I—my friends are not many, but they are prized. I should think it a privilege to count you amongst them, for I believe you have the same feelings about friendship that I have myself, and my ideas on the subject are by no means low ones.'

'Nor mine. And for that reason I am like yourself. My friends are few,' he said, taking the hand she extended, and raising it to his lips, his eyes still fixed on her face. Suddenly her own eyes filled with tears. She turned aside her face, and covered it with her other hand.

'What have I done to deserve such kindness?' she said tremulously, and profoundly moved. And indeed, what is there that should move a human soul more than such a discovery as this—the discovery of a friend?

Schiller felt it when he sang in that great ode, which never has been and never can be translated without being ruined :

> ' Wem der grosse Wurf gelungen,
> *Eines Freundes Freund zu sein*,
> Wer ein holdes Weib errungen,
> Mische seinen Jubel ein !
> Ja, wer auch nur *eine* Seele
> *Sein* nennt, auf dem Erdenrund.
> Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
> Weinend sich aus diesem Bund.'

' It is not kindness so much as selfishness,' said he, gently. ' Do we not all try to grasp that which seems very desirable to us ?'

' It is a kind of selfishness I like,' said Sara, recovering, and flashing a bright glance upon him through the mist which still veiled her eyes.

' I should like to take you to one or two places here—Lotte Buff's house, and Goethe's Well, and some others, if you would care to go,' he said, as if to put aside her still unspoken thanks.

'I should, immensely. Shall we have time before the others come back? Where are they gone, by-the-way?'

'They are gone to a celebrated restauration on the top of that hill, the Kalsmund, which you see opposite, with the ruined tower upon it. At this restauration they are famed for their *Bowle*—pineapple *Bowle;* and I heard young Lemde, and the count, and Arthur Eckberg arranging to take the ladies there and have a large bowl of the said *Bowle,* in the garden of the restauration,' said Falkenberg, with an imperturbable gravity which the light in his eyes belied.

Sara laughed.

'Should we not rather go and find the countess, and ask her to come with us? I am sure she will be dull.'

Accordingly they went to the house, and found the countess nothing loath to accept their invitation that she would accompany them. They had a very delightful tour of discovery; and Sara noticed that wherever they went, their companion appeared to be

known, and that he was greeted with smiles and a pleasant word.

When it was time they returned to the house, and found the rest of the party there, all in the highest good-humour, and all pitying them for having missed the treat they had had—the walk, the view, the ruins, and the *Bowle*.

It was time to go to the railway station, and after a railway journey of one hour and a drive of another, they found that their *Landpartei* was over, and they were again at Schloss Trockenau.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE WELLFIELDS.

AT Ems, the morning of the same day, some time after the Trockenau procession had gone past on its way to the station, two young ladies seated themselves on a bench in the Kurgarten, beside the broad walk. They had brought their novels and their fancy-work, and were of one mind and one spirit in their purpose to idle away the morning, watch the visitors, and, after the manner of Miss Austen's sarcastic heroes and ingenuous heroines, 'quiz the company.' They were English; they were the daughters of an M.P. for one of the great manufacturing

towns. They were staying at the *Vier Jahreszeiten*, and they had closely observed all the rest of the company staying there. Until a few days ago, the most perfect sisterly harmony had reigned between them; but a lamentable discord had lately arisen, and that upon the subject of a man.

'Dora, see! There's your wonderful dark angel coming mooning along with his sister. Pray don't miss the chance of looking at them, since you admire them so much.'

'You are boiling over with spite, Lucy. I will look at them. I like looking at them, and so do you, but you won't own it.'

'*I!*' ejaculated Lucy, with supreme contempt. 'He is very handsome, I grant you; but I believe him to be a sham.'

'What do you mean by a sham?'

'He looks like a hero of romance, and I believe he is a very commonplace personage after all.'

'No one with such a voice could be commonplace, Lucy. Sims Reeves is nothing to him.'

'I should say you were cracked,' replied Lucy, witheringly.

'Should you? What a powerful imagination you must have! He is coming down this way. I am sure "a dark angel" is an excellent name for him.'

'I shall conclude next that you write poetry about him—a man who has never spoken to you, and who doesn't recognise you when he sees you. And as for that tall girl, with her streams of yellow hair, she ought in decency to put it up, in——'

'In a chignon—do say a chignon at once! It would suit her so admirably—about as well as it would suit Venus or Hebe.'

'We shall never agree about them, that is evident.'

'Well, I know that. Do let me admire them in peace. 'Tis all I ask.'

The causes of this deplorable breach of good understanding between two generally loving sisters, were now too near for them to exchange any further remarks about them at present. Lucy indignantly stuck her

parasol between herself and them, and studied her Tauchnitz volume in moody dignity. Dora, perfectly conscious that the Wellfields were unaware of her existence, had no scruple in raising her head as they went past, and looking at them openly and scrutinisingly. They did not see her, being absorbed in conversation, and looking intently at one another. Avice was hanging upon her brother's arm, which she had taken as they left the hotel, and was gazing with a sort of rapt attention into his face, as if something in his looks or his voice attracted her irresistibly. He had been saying something, and had ceased to speak, and this something seemed to give her matter for thought. Soon after they had passed the two girls, Avice said :

'Jerome, since I knew you—how long is it?'

'It is just a month since I came to you here.'

'It seems an eternity of pleasure. My life has changed so much since then that I hardly know myself.'

'For the better, do you mean?' he asked,

looking down upon the delicately beautiful, upturned face, and feeling that Sara Ford's words had been true: 'She will some day be remarkably beautiful.'

'For the better, of course. I used to be very tired of my life sometimes. Often I have sat in our balcony, when we had one at any hotel we were staying at, and envied the ragged children playing in the street.'

'But why, child? My father seems to dote upon you.'

'Oh yes! he dotes upon me, I suppose. But when the doting takes the form of scarcely allowing me to leave the house, and never to go out alone—in all the places we have been at, I never went to see the sights like other girls—I am so ignorant—you cannot imagine *how* ignorant. I know absolutely nothing.'

'You know French and German, and Italian and English.'

'What is that, when I am afraid to speak in them for fear of showing what an ignorant little fool I am!'

'And you know politics. I sat in silent awe and amazement the other day when you were telling my father about the ministerial tactics in France and England.'

'Oh! because I have read the papers to papa for years. I don't know any grammar, nor any arithmetic, nor——'

'What can you want with them? Grammar is bosh.'

'*Jerome!*'

'Of course it is bosh. Never be afraid to call it bosh. And as for arithmetic, you can add up what you receive and what you spend, I suppose.'

'But I don't mean that kind of arithmetic. I knew an English girl a little while ago where we were at Florence. She was spending the winter holidays there, and papa allowed me to go to see her sometimes. She showed me the work she had to do during the holidays, and it made me feel, oh, so fearfully ignorant. One of her sums was, "Find the present value of £760 at four and five-eighths per cent. for eighty days." That is

what *I* call arithmetic,' said Avice, despondently.

'Do you? Well, suppose we look out for a governess for both of us, for I know just as much about it as you do.'

Avice laughed and said: 'It would have to be a very clever governess, Jerome.'

'But not old and ugly, or I could not possibly learn from her; and yet, if she were young and handsome, I might fall in love with her. Upon my word, I think I should like to have a governess, Avice. Shall we see about it?'

'How ridiculous you are! Since I have had you, I don't care so much about a governess. How horribly frightened of you I was, before I saw you. Papa used to pinch my ear sometimes when he wanted to tease me, and say, "I wonder what Hieronymus will say when he first sees you—little interloper!" When I asked what you were like, he said I should have to mind my P's and Q's with you. Naturally I trembled at the very idea of beholding you.'

'It was too bad to make me out such a bugbear.'

'Oh, he did not make you out a bugbear, exactly; but he gave me a fearful idea of you. And one day he told me that you had been sent for—that was when he was ill, and thought he would not get better. And he added that when he was gone, you would have all his authority, and that he advised me to make myself agreeable to you. It was woman's mission, he said, to make herself agreeable.'

'My father has curious ideas upon woman's mission and place in life, my dear. If he were to come in contact with the world again, he would find that they were out of date. Well?'

'I was in the greatest anxiety. I did not know whether to put on my oldest, shabbiest frock, and to go and sit up in my bedroom, and not come down till I was sent for, and not speak till I was spoken to.'

'What end did you purpose to serve by such a course?'

'I thought you would think, "At least she is quite insignificant, and will not be in my way." Then I thought it might be better to make myself look as well as I possibly could——'

'Which you knew to be very well indeed, Miss Vanity, in your bronze velvet gown with the amber slashings, which makes you look like some picture of Titian or Veronese, but which would not lead anyone to suppose that you were an English school-girl.'

'Oh, don't call me an English school-girl. I think they are horrid. They know so much more than I do. But do you like me in that dress?'

'Very much.'

'I thought, well, if he sees me in this, he will think, "Ah, after all she is presentable. She might be worse."'

'Preposterous child! Finally, if I remember aright——'

'Finally, papa was so ill that I forgot all about my dress. I was in a black frock, sitting beside his bed, I know, when you came.'

'Yes, I remember. My eyes fell upon you the instant I came in. I remember being struck, then and there, with the contrast between your white face and black dress, and great startled eyes, and this flood of gold, Avice.' He smiled slightly as he touched a tress of her hair.

'And I remember that as you came in, I really turned cold with anxiety and alarm. You were pale too, and your eyes seemed to burn upon me. I remember how you walked up to my father, and bent over him, and I thought suddenly, "Oh, I hope he will like me!" Then papa remembered me, and took my hand, and said, "Here's Avice—you must learn to know her, for when I'm gone she will have no one but you; and she is a hot-house plant, I can tell you." And you, Jerome, you took my hand—I could not speak. You smiled at me, and I felt as if a tight string had been cut loose from my heart; and you said, "One only needs to look at her to see that." I must have looked alarmed, for you said, "Do you think you

can spare me a little of your regard, my child?" and you put your arm round me, and kissed me. I would have *died* for you, Jerome, from that moment,' she concluded, looking into his face with eyes full of suppressed, passionate devotion.

'Why, you never told me before anything of this,' he said, in some surprise.

'Because I waited to see if you would change; if you would presently begin to think me an interloper. But I know you don't. Oh, I do so love you!'

He took her chin in his hand, and looked down into the glowing, excited young face; then stooped and kissed her, saying: 'I only wish we had not been strangers so long.'

They turned back, having come to the end of the garden, and Avice went on:

'I have a great many things to ask about, Jerome. First, I want to know if we are rich?'

'Rich! No. At least, not millionaires. I don't exactly know what my father's

income is. Somewhere about two or three thousand a year, I suppose. He has always allowed me six hundred, since I came of age; and it has been quite enough.'

'But you lead such a simple life, compared with that of some young men.'

He looked at her, surprised. 'What do you know about the lives "some" young men lead?'

'I don't know anything, except that most of papa's gentlemen friends spend more than six hundred a year, I am sure. I could not help seeing things, when we have stayed in so many places. You don't keep a lot of horses, nor play cards for large stakes, nor give grand entertainments, nor spend heaps of money on dress.'

'In all those matters I am severely virtuous, I confess—at any rate, in the last. At the same time, my sweet child, I have always, by dint of unwearying exertions, contrived to live up to my income; and perhaps had it been larger even, I might have succeeded in spending it.'

'I daresay; but you know what I mean. You would never be like young Baron Zeppenheim, for instance, whom we knew at Wiesbaden. I really believe he had hundreds of suits of clothes.'

Jerome laughed.

'I think, sister mine, that such things have about the same significance for us both. You look charming in your bronze velvet, with the old Venetian clasps; but had you nothing to wear but some old black serge, you would still be what you are.'

'I suppose so. I cannot imagine what difference it makes. But next I want to ask, have you ever been to our home—our real home that belongs to us—and has the same name as ourselves?'

'Have I ever been at Wellfield? Of course I have—ages ago, though, when I was a boy of ten or eleven—nearly sixteen years ago, Avice; and yet I remember it as well as if it had been yesterday.'

'Is it nice?'

'It is a fine old place—yes—in a fine

country. I should like well to see it again.'

'I want to go there dreadfully, Jerome. Couldn't you persuade papa to let us go and stay there for a while when he gets better? He never will talk to me about it. He says it is a musty old place, and that I may think I should like it, but that I should be like himself if I got there—dead in a week, *aus lauter Langeweile.* But I know better. I should be able to do as I liked, and to go out without a maid, and without gloves; and could have a room of my own to put my things in, without the horrid consciousness that in a week or two I should have to rout them all out again. That's what I feel here; I feel an outcast.'

'You have never seen the home of your ancestors, and you are sixteen! I never in the least realised it. Certainly you shall go. I will work him up to it.'

'Oh, Jerome, you are an angel!' she exclaimed fervently.

They were passing the English sisters again, who had quarrelled about them; and

on hearing this exclamation, and seeing the enraptured face held up to Jerome, 'Dora' gave an exultant glance towards 'Lucy,' who merely shrugged her shoulders.

'Were you so anxious to see the old place?' pursued Jerome. 'Well, I don't wonder. It is a place to be proud of.'

'Why don't you go and live there? You could.'

'Ah, that is another thing. Wellfield is a lovely spot, and the Abbey is a place to be proud of, no doubt; but to live there, after the kind of life one has been accustomed to here—*c'est autre chose!* It's a Roman Catholic neighbourhood. Brentwood is close to, you know—the great Jesuit seminary, and a lot of those fossilised Roman Catholic gentry, as proud as Lucifer, and as exclusive as—as only such people can be.'

'But surely we are their equals.'

'Oh dear, yes! We have always been on the best of terms with them all, chiefly perhaps because we have been so little at Wellfield that there has been no time or

chance for differences to arise. I don't know how I should like it to live in, unless——'

'Unless what?'

'If something I should like very much took place, I should certainly ask my father to let me take up my abode at the Abbey. Who knows, Avice, under what circumstances you may go first to Wellfield Abbey?'

They found themselves opposite the *Vier Jahreszeiten.* Jerome looked at his watch.

'I tell you what, young lady, we have consumed no end of time in this discussion. My father will think himself ill-used. We promised to walk with him at twelve. Come and let us find him.'

They went into the hall, and an attendant hurried up to them, only to say that Mr. Wellfield the elder had been taken very ill while reading his newspapers before rising, that a doctor had been sent for, and that he lay now between life and death.

Jerome and his sister hastened upstairs, and found their father in alternate convulsions of pain and intervals of utter, swooning un-

consciousness. The doctor came, and after a very short examination pronounced the attack to be a most serious one. A Sister of Mercy from a neighbouring institution was sent for. Hours of suspense and anxiety passed before the delirious anguish of the patient at all abated. The dusk of evening had fallen, when the doctor, coming into the salon, found Jerome and Avice seated together in the window; the girl's head pillowed on her brother's knee, her hand in his.

'Your father is now composed, and perfectly sensible,' said the doctor. 'He is very anxious to speak to you alone,' he added, to Jerome. 'The Sister will wait in the anteroom. Call her if there is the least need for help. She knows what to do. I will look in again about midnight.'

With a brief good-evening he was gone; and Jerome, rising, went to his father's room.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND SON ARRANGE ACCOUNTS.

A LAMP was brightly burning in the sick-room, with a shade over it, and so placed as not to dazzle the invalid's eyes. The Sister had left the room when Jerome entered ; and there was a stillness as of death over everything. Jerome went up to the bedside, and stooped over the motionless figure lying back, nerveless and exhausted, after the agonies of pain which had shaken the already feeble frame. The face upon which the lamplight shone was, or had been, a fine one, as regarded features. These bore little resemblance to those of his son, though they, like Jerome's, were finely

cut, pale, and clear. Now, they were wasted and waxen in their languid weariness. A high, somewhat bald forehead, a long, slender, grey moustache gave a thoroughly un-English appearance to the whole countenance. As Jerome's hands pressed the hedclothes, and he stooped without speaking over the pillow, the large closed eyelids were raised, and a pair of strange bright blue eyes were discovered, such eyes as are often the token of a cool, self-seeking disposition—eyes which contained a light and a life which not even this day of mortal pain had been able utterly to quench.

Face of father and face of son were near together; the one evidently near death, the other scarcely less pale, quite as still and composed, yet eloquent of health and strength, and early manhood's pride and power.

'Ah, Jerome, it is you?' came in a feeble voice from the patient.

'I am thankful to hear that you are out of pain, sir. My sister and I have passed some anxious hours.'

'Yes; I feel easier now.'

He spoke so slowly, so languidly, and so faintly, that the voice was scarce audible.

'You sent for me; at least, Dr. Reichhardt said you wished to see me.'

'Yes; I have something to say to you. Sit down.'

Jerome seated himself on a chair which stood beside the bed, and waited. Since opening his eyes, and seeing his son stooping over him, Mr. Wellfield had not closed them again. They looked restlessly round—at the ceiling, the wall, the window—anywhere, except into his son's face. It was some little time before he spoke again; what he had to say seemed to require a considerable effort of some kind. At last, in a voice which had suddenly gained strength, he said:

'You don't know what caused me to be so suddenly taken ill to-day.'

'I had not thought of the cause. I was disturbed at the fact.'

'I had a severe shock, after you went out this morning.'

'Indeed!' said Jerome, with some animation; 'I hope no carelessness——'

'None at all, except the carelessness of circumstances, which is apt to be astonishing sometimes, especially to those who suffer from it,' he retorted, a sarcastic flavour in his voice. 'I ought to have spoken to you long ago—long ago.'

Again he paused, and again Jerome waited. He had not the faintest, most conjectural idea of the subject upon which his father desired to speak to him. He was beginning now to wonder vaguely what it could be. They had no confidences, this father and son. Their tastes, habits, and dispositions had always been utterly dissimilar. The elder Wellfield had gone his own way, had led his life of aimless travel from place to place, generally from one fashionable foreign invalid colony to another, accompanied by his daughter and her maid, and by his own manservant. His son had enjoyed the fullest liberty to do the same; to live exactly as seemed good in his own eyes, only receiving

long ago the curt recommendation to remember who he was, and that there were some things that a gentleman could never do. 'No need to tell a gentleman what these things are,' he had further been informed. 'If he be a gentleman, he will very soon learn them for himself; if not, scorpions could not whip the knowledge into him.'

Furnished with such a formula, or creed, as the basis of his ethical system, Jerome Wellfield had been left to his own devices. Three times since his father's second marriage, Jerome had met and stayed with that father. The first time Avice had been a baby, on the other occasions she had been visiting friends unknown to her brother. Jerome and his father had always agreed together perfectly well. Each was conscious that the other had tastes and habits and views of life which to himself would have been most distasteful. Each had had civilisation and *savoir vivre* enough to ignore that altogether during their brief glimpses of one another. They had never quarrelled—they

had never been friends. Mr. Wellfield had enjoyed his life of idle valetudinarianism—his lazy days, his evenings at cards, or in reading-rooms, or lighted gardens. Jerome had enjoyed his life—his pleasant search after the harmonious and the beautiful in life, in art, in nature. He had gradually shut himself up in his own reserve ; in his over-refined cultivation and fastidiousness ; he had 'built his soul a lordly pleasure-house, wherein at ease for aye to dwell,' till now what was ugly and coarse made him shudder, and gave him pain that was almost physical. All this refinement, he often told himself, was not essential to him ; he could do without it ; poverty would not be anything to dread, for one could have simplicity therewith ; the real bane of existence was common, rampant, triumphant philistinism. Wherever he went, he had been well received, and generally flattered : his beauty, his voice, the charm of his manner alone, would have made him the despair of prudent mothers, even as a detrimental ; but when to those advantages was

added the primary one, that he was an only son, heir to a fine estate, of unimpeachably good and ancient name and lineage, an impartial judge must confess that it was a great thing that Jerome Wellfield had come out of the ordeal, at least outwardly, unscathed, calm, unperturbed, unvulgarised.

Open admiration and adulation had revolted his fastidious soul. Till he met Sara Ford, he had never gone further than a mild flirtation with any girl, for he was hard to please. But, having met her, all was changed. Her beauty, her pride, her indifference, calm and smiling, to what other women so eagerly sought after—the fact that she was no easy prize, despite her loneliness and her poverty, had fired him. He had loved with a rapidity and a passion which showed the strange blending of north and south, of Italy and England, that was in him, and that made him what he was. And he, as little as anyone, knew what he was. In him there were two natures ; he only knew one, for up to now his mother's side alone had grown and

flourished; he little knew the modifications of southern character which he inherited from that man beside whose bed he sat, waiting for the disclosure which he struggled to utter.

Born beneath southern skies, brought up in his very early childhood in Italian cities, these influences engraved themselves deeply, indelibly upon his nature. The mother's blood streaked every thought, every impulse, with a mixture of passion and indolence, fire and superstition. That mother had been the beautiful daughter of an old, impoverished Sicilian house—a house which had never before married out of its own nation and its own sphere. To her son she bequeathed her own hereditary tendencies—she had had much of the indolence, all the superstition of that glorious, yet degraded race of Magna Græcia.

In after-days, when Jerome looked up into the murky skies of Lancashire—those skies which gloomed over the grey walls of his father's house—those deep, unspeakably blue

heavens whose glory bathed the marbles of Venice, the quays of Naples, the ruins of Rome, the pictures of Florence, whose glamour lent itself to the whispering, rustling grey of the olives on Mediterranean coast terraces, and made the yellow sand more yellow, the blue sea more deeply violet, the white sail more dazzling—this remembered heaven used to rush to his recollection with a light that was almost lurid, and scattered tones of a speech that was music seemed to ring melodiously in his ears. Italy had faded, yet her finger-mark remained inefface-able upon his innermost heart, as his mother's beauty remained upon earth, stamped in the beauty of his own face and the melody of his voice, which, so long as voice or feature remained, should visibly and audibly attest the presence upon earth of a land where skies are warmer, where love is fiercer, where passions run more quickly into white-hot rages than in this humid isle of ours.

Another influence had been almost as strong as that of Italy—as strong as any influence

which is not already in a man's natural tendencies can be—and that influence was Germany. After a brief stay in England, during which his father's second marriage had taken place, he had been sent to the gymnasium of ——, where he had gone through all the courses, and, besides the regular school-training, had been trained also in the school of music.

In that land his voice and his musical powers formed a passport. By degrees, the Italian ditties, with their oily sweetness, slipped away, as they have the trick of doing, from his tongue, and the rougher, deeper songs of the Fatherland grew at home there. Casting himself with eagerness into the art, he grew more and more devoted to it, and but for one thing he often felt as if he would never care to leave this *Deutschland*, this home of mighty harmonies, this adopted country. That one thing was the remembrance of his home itself—of the weird, ancient Abbey, with its dark, quaint gardens, its cloisters beside the river; and the still

more ancient church which he dimly remembered.

Since his love for Sara Ford had arisen, he had thought and dreamed still oftener of this ancient place. Now he knew—he had thought of it when he spoke to Avice that morning—that with her by his side there was no place he would so gladly go to, and stay there. What a life they might lead—she with her art, and he with his—and with their love! He felt a thrill—felt the blood course quickly on, as he pictured her—it was the first time he had seen the picture clearly—with him at Wellfield—his wife.

'Perhaps, when you know, you may blame me; and yet—where would you have been all these years if I had acted differently? Did you know that Wellfield had ever been entailed?'

'I think I have heard something about it,' said Jerome, surprised at the abruptness of the question, and roused from his dream.

'It was entailed until my father's time.

He and your great-grandfather agreed to cut it off.'

'Did they? Why?'

'Because the estate was thoroughly embarrassed, and deep in debt, and they wanted to restore it.'

'Then they succeeded?' asked Jerome, to whom this was news, but who concluded that they must have succeeded. Had there been embarrassments, surely he would have heard of them before now.

'No; they did not. Neither of them had the faintest notion of business'—it is to be presumed that Mr. Wellfield was conscious of himself possessing business talents of a superior order. 'They got money, but that wasn't improving the estate. They did not retrench, and they spent nothing on improvements. When I came into possession, I was worse off than any Wellfield had ever been before.'

'I had no idea of that,' said Jerome.

'Of course you had not. How could you have? It is a fact, nevertheless. I went

through some bitter experiences. I had all their pride, and none of their resources. I saw no way out of it. Your mother once saw the place, and screamed at the very idea of living there. She said she would die if she had to live out of Italy. It was therefore impossible for me to live on my estate, and retrench, as almost any other man might have done under the circumstances. Knowing this, I kept you as much away from the place as possible, lest you should get fond of it. Things got worse and worse. After your sister's mother died, my own health failed, and it became impossible for me to live in England. I saw ruin staring me in the face. I saw you, whom I wished never to be troubled with sordid cares and anxieties, growing up utterly unconscious of the kind of lot that was hanging over you. I seemed to see Avice, your sister, stinted of common comforts, and perhaps reduced, as she grew up, to earn her living as a governess, *she*—ordered about by strange people, and breaking her heart with fretting.'

'Good God, sir! What must you have gone through! And why did you not confide in me? Anything in my power——'

'But there was nothing in your power—that is exactly it. I did the only thing that could be done. I looked my circumstances full in the face, and the sight was not inspiriting. Presently came a man with what I wanted—money—any amount of money. I—I sold Wellfield.'

'Sold it!' echoed the young man, in a voice of horror and incredulity combined, as he started from his chair, and looked into his father's face. 'You are dreaming. You are delirious. Let me call Sister Ursula—you——'

'Sit down again!' said his father, turning upon him eyes so calm and lucid in their perfect reasonableness and self-possession, that Jerome felt his very heart give way within him.

This sin had been committed. He had dreamed no ugly dream. He dropped into his chair again, propped his head upon his

hands, and tried to take in what his father went on to say.

'I sold it for forty thousand pounds to a man called Bolton, who had a wild desire to have it. He had some odd crotchet about it. It was a dream of his to have the old place——'

'But for you to dream of selling it,' interrupted the young man, with suppressed passion.

'Needs must when the devil drives. Had you been in my position—but there, I won't argue. I did it. I sold it. I invested the money, and——'

'If the money is there, all is well,' interrupted Jerome, eagerly. 'It can be bought back again. That is what you mean, I suppose. You want to explain why Avice and I shall be poor and straitened after you have gone. Never mind, sir; there will be a pittance, I daresay. I am young. I can work, and I will do so. When Wellfield is ours again, we shall be content with very little else. Do not reproach yourself.'

'What are you talking about?' retorted the other in a voice almost of anger, and the drops stood on his brow, for it was hard work to brave it out. 'Do you suppose I should have made all this circumstance about it if the money had been there? I tell you the money is gone. It was invested—half in mortgages, and half in the Mutual Liability Bank of ——. The bank is gone—the newspaper—this morning. It was there I saw it—made me ill. The bank is limited, but the other half—liable—ah!'

His eyes closed; he sank back, his face very pale. For a moment Jerome did not move, but sat still, staring at the white face with a blank, stupid gaze. Then he said, quite audibly, for he had a vague impression that his father was unconscious:

'Sold it! I would as soon have thought of selling my wife or my sister.'

'Would you?' replied his father, opening his eyes unexpectedly upon Jerome. 'When misfortune has resulted from any course, it is the easiest thing in the world to say you

would never have done it. Had I not done it, you would have been a beggar years ago. For purchasing you years of enjoyment and prosperity, you reproach me. I have my reward.'

There was a flash in this of the more than dissimilarity of tastes which had, *au fond*, existed always between father and son—the absolute antagonism—until now delicately glazed over into a semblance of indifference, but ready to burst forth the moment that really deep feelings were touched.

An angry, bitter retort was upon Jerome's tongue—the retort that his father, in purchasing those 'years of prosperity and enjoyment,' of which he made such a merit, had incidentally purchased with them years of something else—which years the young man seemed to see now very clearly unrolling themselves before him—drear and bitter. But his father was about to leave the world—there could be little doubt of that—and there certainly was something in his manner of doing it very strongly suggestive

of his having done the best for himself while he lived—denied himself no luxury, made no sacrifice, not even that very commonly necessary sacrifice of early avowing an unpleasant truth because it is right to do so—and of his then quietly slipping away, and leaving the son whom he had never accustomed to work, and the daughter whom he had taught to look upon luxury and refinement as matters of course, to battle as best they might with adverse circumstances. This view of the case certainly did rush very strongly over Jerome's mind. His hot southern blood drove some very bitter, sarcastic comments to his lips; but suddenly another feeling prevailed over them—a feeling of cool, calm calculation; a sense that there must be some way out of all this coil, and a private resolve that this man who had the Abbey now, should not keep it very long. Mastering his hot and furious anger, he said coldly:

'It would be useless to dispute the matter. The damage, it appears, is done. Wellfield

has passed away from us, and the poor money you got for it has passed away too. But I suppose your affairs are in the hands of some man of business?'

'Yes; Netley of Manchester knows all my concerns. No doubt there will be a letter from him immediately. He will have to give you information, and settle it all up.'

'Netley of Manchester!' said Jerome, deliberately making a note of it. 'Where does he live?'

'His offices are at 57, Canongate.'

Another note. Then Jerome said:

'Have you any idea whether everything will go—whether not even a pittance will be left?—enough for Avice to live upon, while I try to find something to do?'

He spoke coldly and hardly, and in a matter-of-fact tone; but as he uttered the words, a vision rose before him of Sara Ford; of her eyes, as he had whispered to her, 'And do you understand?' He shivered a little. Mr. Wellfield, too, was moved by

his words; by this stern bringing to reality and commonplace of the whole affair. He gave a slight groan as he turned his head restlessly, saying:

'I don't know. O God! I know nothing about it. But'—his voice grew almost fierce—'remember, sir, as long as you have a penny, your sister remains with you.'

'I hope I know my duty towards my sister, sir, as well as you appear to have known yours to your daughter,' returned Jerome, in a voice of some astringency; 'and——'

They had been parting words. The deathly expression upon his father's face alarmed him. He rang the bell, and Sister Ursula answered it. Restoratives were applied, but in vain. The flame did not flicker up again. In a very short time Jerome knew that the face upon which he looked was dead—the eternal repose had settled upon the features. Clouds and tempests were over for him; rocks and shoals of life beset the path of him who was left. He who was taken had

slipped comfortably away. The pain of want, of narrow circumstances, the smarting for the sins of his fathers, had never been his, nor the joy begotten of self-abnegation—the peace that comes to one weary with a burden gallantly borne.

* * * * *

Jerome went into the salon again. The lamp had been lighted. Avice sat on a couch, her hands folded before her, her eyes anxiously turned towards the door. She sprang up as he came in.

'Jerome, is he better? Has he gone to sleep?'

'He has gone to sleep, my love; but he will never awaken again. He died just now.'

'Oh! is he dead?'

She clung to him, looking up into his face, in which she saw nothing but a pale, fixed calmness.

'Dead, Avice. And you must brace yourself up, and prepare for a trial, and that a sore one. You asked me if we were rich,

dear, and I told you we had ample means. It was not true, though I did not know it. We have now either nothing, or next to nothing. You asked me if we should go back to Wellfield, and I promised that you should soon go there. I cannot keep my promise. Wellfield is no longer ours. We have no home. To-morrow I will explain. To-night I can only tell you the facts. You said that your life had been happier since you knew me. What do you say to your brother and his kindness now?'

Her eyes were eloquent as she looked up at him, and said, gravely and calmly:

'I love my brother for trusting in me. And he shall never hear a murmur from my lips if he will continue to trust me and guide me.'

As they stood together, they kissed one another with a kind of solemnity. Life was changed, but they still remained to sustain one another.

CHAPTER VI.

AVICE READS A CHAPTER OF A NEW BOOK.

THERE was no reason for, and no wish to linger at Ems when the necessary delay was over, and the necessary business accomplished. In a week from the time of Mr. Wellfield's death, Jerome and his sister proposed to leave the place, on their way home. During this week, Avice lived through more surprise, more wonder, and more emotion, compressed into seven short days, than had been contained in seven long years of her former life.

Her brother and his character formed to her a strange new book, which she was never weary of studying. The outside of that

book was of the most alluring character; and she, of an intensely receptive nature, and intensely sensitive, too, to beauty, delighted in that fair outside, in those polished manners, in the smooth, calm, composed demeanour. She delighted to go out with Jerome, to behold others turning to look at him; in every proof that she was not alone in her sense of being fascinated by him. They naturally went out little during those days of waiting; when they did go, they went alone together, avoiding the crowded gardens and the more public walks. They had, therefore, ample opportunity of learning more of one another; and perhaps each modified the estimate already formed of the other's character. But the affection increased. In their long walks to the *Concordia*, or along the white country roads, Jerome told her about all their circumstances—told her he did not know whether they would have any secure income, even the smallest, upon which to live; asked her if she could reconcile herself to existence with him, perhaps in a back

parlour of some dingy town-lodgings. To all of which questions her 'yes, oh, yes!' leaped out with an eager readiness.

'Now I begin to see what papa meant when he kept calling me a little interloper, Jerome,' she said one day. 'If it were not for me, how much easier everything would be for you. I have heard that a man, alone, need never fear anything, even starvation; but that when he has a woman with him it clogs him, and paralyses him, and unfits him——'

'Hush, child!' he said, putting his finger on her lip, and smiling at the same time; 'that is nothing less than blasphemy, and I know where you learnt it.'

Avice hung her head. Presently she looked up again, remarking:

'Living with papa first, and then with you, Jerome, is like going to school first with one schoolmaster, and then with another; and one uses the cane, and the other doesn't.'

'Is it?'

'Sometimes, with papa, the sensation was

just like what I could imagine a child feeling on being told, "Hold out your hand." Horrible!'

'You don't mean——' he began sharply.

'That papa was cruel? Oh no! He never meant to be, at any rate. I suppose he could not help being cold and sarcastic and severe in manner. What he hated most was what he called drivelling sentimentality. I always knew in an instant when I had said something sentimental. And I think, as long as I live, I shall never forget the tone of his voice as he used to say, "That is your view of the case, is it, mademoiselle? Suppose we look at it in the light in which persons of judgment will see it." And then, how foolish I was made to feel! Papa certainly could put people down in a way I never saw anyone else use.'

She sighed, and Jerome smiled rather bitterly, commiserating the young creature who had been trained in such a school.

'She must be naturally gentle, I suppose, or she would have been—good heavens! who

knows what she might have been at one-and-twenty ?'

He could not but see, however, that she had much of his own intense fastidiousness, and that she was proud, and that frequently a flash of the sarcasm from which she had suffered would appear in her own remarks. And he was in despair at the prospect of the future which lay before her. Avice herself did not give much thought to that future. She was happier in the present than she ever had been before.

The day came at last, the last day of their stay at Ems. In the morning they were to leave. Jerome strolled into their sitting-room in the evening, and found Avice there.

'*Gott sei dank!*' he remarked. 'All the dismissals are over.'

He had been discharging his sister's maid and his father's valet. For the future Avice was to learn to mend and perhaps make her own clothes, dress her own hair, and otherwise become a useful and practical member of society.

'Then they are gone, Jerome?'

'Yes, they are gone.'

'Toinette came in floods of tears to say adieu. "Ah, mademoiselle!" she exclaimed, "when I reflect upon your hair, and your desolation, without me, I am *près à mourir*."'

'She will soon console herself. She was flirting atrociously with the porter when I went downstairs.'

'And, Jerome, it has suddenly occurred to me to ask you, at what hour do we start in the morning, and by what route do we travel to England?'

There was a pause, as she looked at him, and saw that her brother's eyes were fixed upon a book upon the table, and that there was an expression in his face which she did not quite understand. At last he raised his eyes, and said, with, as she thought, some little constraint:

'We must take the "cheapest and best" route from the Continent, I suppose: Cologne, Rotterdam, and Harwich. I am sorry for you, my child, but——'

'Oh, sorry, nonsense! I am not made of white sugar, Jerome. Then, at what time must we leave? Shall I have to get up very early?'

'No earlier than usual, for I propose breaking the journey, and staying all night at Elberthal.'

'At Elberthal? Why there? It is not a pretty town, and Cologne is far more interesting, though I am tired of it.'

'I know Elberthal is not pretty. But there is some one there whom I wish to see before I go to England.'

'Oh, is it anyone I know?'

'I think you have seen her once or twice. It is Miss Sara Ford.'

'Miss Ford!' repeated Avice, not at the first moment comprehending. 'That beautiful Miss Ford who was with the Countess of Trockenau so often? Is she a friend——'

Then, as she still continued looking at Jerome, she understood in a moment, and stopped abruptly. This was a new phase of life, a fresh complication in her circumstances, towards which her thoughts had

never before turned for a moment. For a few moments she sat quite still, saying nothing, pondering upon it; then, rising quickly, she went to Jerome, and put her arm round his neck.

'Oh, Jerome,' she murmured, in a half-tearful voice, 'how much you must have had to suffer! I never knew till now what "ruin" and having no money might mean.'

He returned her kiss, saying gently, 'Never mind, *Liebchen!* Things may turn out well in the end. And meantime, before we face Manchester and ruin, there is Elberthal to be passed.'

The following day they departed by the afternoon boat from Ober-Lahnstein for Cologne, thence to take the train to Elberthal. It was a gorgeous afternoon, at the very end of July. The sun was hot, the river was smooth, the scenery was glowing, the boat was full of gay parties of travellers of all nations, when Wellfield and his sister went upon it. A little after six they arrived at Elberthal, and went to an hotel.

CHAPTER VII.

LIFE'S FULLEST STREAM.

THE daylight lasts late in July. Though growing dusk in the house, it was yet broad daylight on the balcony of the room in which Jerome left his sister, when he set out to find Sara Ford's house. It was still broad daylight out of doors, and the streets were thronged with pleasure-seekers, and with the feet of those on business intent. He had Sara's address —Jägerstrasse, No. 42. He inquired the way there, and was directed to go through a pleasant green Hofgarten, whose cool avenues and great trees were just now glorified by the yellow rays of the setting

sun. Somewhere, in the direction of that setting sun, he knew the Rhine wandered by the town. He had heard Sara describe how broad and strong was its course just there, and what a fascination it had for her, despite the unpicturesque, low, flat banks on either side. As he went along, his heart was light, despite the heavy load of cares and anxiety which hung over him.

Sounds of music or singing greeted him wherever he went, as they do in those homely continental towns devoted to art and to sentiment. There was a pleasant, homely bustle going on. The town was small. One could not easily have lost oneself in it. To find the Jägerstrasse was no difficult matter, and once there it was easier still to discover No. 42, which was a great white house of many stories, with an arched passage running through it from front to back, and heavy iron gates, at present thrown back. He went into the passage, and to the side door, which had the names of the different inhabitants put up. 'Miss S. Ford, *2te Etage*,' he read, and

pulled the bell twice. His summons was presently answered by a middle-aged woman with a strong, sensible, good English face, about whose whole aspect there was a harmony, and in whose dress there was an appropriateness and suitability which were nothing short of admirable.

'Is Miss Ford at home?' he asked, like one in a dream; for, up to the moment of pulling the bell, he had been engaged in a puzzling mental debate as to whether he ought or ought not to come—whether duty did not clearly indicate the preferableness of bringing his sister with him, or sending a note to Miss Ford, and not calling at all.

He was not in the habit of having difficult and delicate questions of this kind to decide, and he had dallied with this one until the second had arrived in which he must either pull the bell, and go in and see her, or turn back, and go away without seeing her. At which moment the latter alternative had appeared so horrible that he had lost not

an instant in availing himself of the former one.

Miss Ford was at home. She had returned yesterday, said the woman, and asked him to come upstairs, taking the card he offered her, as she spoke. He accordingly followed her till she threw open a door, and entered a room where it seemed twilight; for it faced due south, and there was only a pale reflection to be seen of the westerly glow.

In the window, in a large lounging chair, he saw a woman's figure, in a light dress, which figure had a book in its hands, and leaned towards the light as if to catch 'the last pale beam of even.' He saw how she turned as her servant gave her his card, took it, read it, and rose. Then—he did not quite know how it was—they were alone, standing hand in hand, looking at one another, speechless. In the suddenness and the greatness of the joy of meeting, they could not be conventional. They failed entirely to use the requisite words of polite surprise and delight which, if promptly

uttered, conceal so many a throb of joy—so many a spasm of pain. The 'Really, what a surprise! Where do you come from?' The answering, 'Passing through on my way to England, and could not resist the pleasure of calling'—none of it all was forthcoming. The surprise on her side was too real, the joy on both too intense, to leave room for any of those prettinesses.

Jerome, looking at her in the softened, yet still clear light, thought he had never seen anything half so beautiful, as she stood with her hand in his, and her eyes fixed with something like fascination in their gaze upon his face. At last, he put his other hand upon hers; and her gaze could no longer meet his deep look, as he said, in a low voice:

'Then you are not displeased with me for coming? You are glad to see me?'

'Very glad,' she replied, in a lower tone still. But it was as if, with the actual sound of his voice and her own, her presence of mind deserted her. She felt herself begin to tremble. Withdrawing her hand from his,

she sank down again upon her chair, and pointed to one beside her, saying, hesitatingly:

'You have left Ems suddenly. I—I heard of your father's death, before I left Trockenau. I did not like to intrude or—or I would have written; but——'

'But you have thought of me?' he said, looking intently at her half-averted face.

'Yes, I thought of you,' replied Sara.

'I hoped you would, though I do not deserve that you should. I must explain why I called. I am on my way home—to England, that is, with my sister. I have to go to look after my affairs, such as they are. You said, when you were talking at Trockenau, that you would allow me to call when I passed through Elberthal. Miss Ford—I——'

'You—yes?' she asked, for he had paused.

'I have fought a desperate battle with myself, to know whether I ought to do what I most desired to do—whether I ought to call upon you or not.'

'Whether you ought. Why not? I do not understand——'

'Hear me out!' he exclaimed; and when he had spoken those words, he knew that he must tell her all. There was now no alternative, in honour and honesty, and he felt a kind of rejoicing, as if he had won a battle, nor paused any longer to reflect upon the means by which it had been gained.

'And first,' he added, rising, and standing before her in the window, looking into her upturned, wondering face, 'first let me tell you, a great change has come over my whole life. It will never be what I had once hoped for. With my father's death I have had to awaken to disagreeable facts. I find myself a ruined man.'

'Ruined?' echoed Sara, vaguely, hanging on his words, which came rapidly now, and with a sort of terse, restrained impetuosity. 'Ruined, Mr. Wellfield?'

'Exactly so. I will not trouble you by going into details of the matter. The simple fact is that I have been living under a

delusion. I have never imagined myself in any other circumstances than those in which I have always been nurtured. One's thoughts turn to the future sometimes, and in youth often and glowingly, I think. So did mine. I was no exception to the rule. Believe me, I never calculated on my father's death. That I can say honestly——'

'No, I am sure of it.'

'But I should have been more than human had the thought never crossed my mind that after his death I should be richer than I had been—should have more at my disposal, and should be able more freely to follow the bent of my own tastes and desires. He never gave me the least hint that there was anything false in such an idea. I have told you of Wellfield—of my old home, to which I had hoped, more than I knew myself, to succeed. Lately I had thought of it far more than formerly, and had imagined myself very happy there. It is no longer mine. My father, it seems, sold the place years ago, and the estate with it, in consequence of his

own money embarrassments. His speculations have turned out badly, it seems. No need to relate how. The money he received for his fathers' house, and the estate they had lived upon, is gone—utterly gone. It was the shock of hearing suddenly of this which brought on the attack of which he died. He had time to tell me the worst—that I was houseless, homeless, it may be penniless—this he told me, advised me to settle things as well as I could, and then he died.'

There was a concentrated bitterness in his voice; a contempt which broke through the calm, soft tones in which he spoke, and which revealed to his listener an entirely new side of his character. He said no word of blame regarding his father, but none the less was the blame there—trenchant and biting, if unspoken.

'Oh, Mr. Wellfield!' was all she could say, 'your trials have indeed been hard. I knew nothing of this.'

'No. And perhaps you are wondering why I should trouble you with the tale, and

thinking that it could be no possible concern of yours——Forgive me,' he added, in the same low but vehement voice, as he came nearer to her, and bent over her chair, 'I have no right—I have told you all this story to show you how destitute I am of all right to speak to you; but when I first met you—when you roused me from my selfish self-satisfaction, and I learned to love and worship you, as I had never imagined that I could worship, then I believed that I had to offer you, not only my whole heart and my entire devotion, but other things not utterly unworthy of your just claims; I believed that I could surround you, as I should have delighted in doing, with every outward sign of the love I bore you. All that is gone, and in its going has carried with it my hope; for it would be insult for me to ask your love when I have just learnt that I am a pauper. But I am not ashamed that you should know I did love you. Good God! did love you—that I *do* love you! That passion masters me yet, and always will master me.

Nay, do not speak, do not rebuke me, and yet—yes, tell me,' he cried, taking her hand, 'tell me if you ever could have returned that love of mine, if I——'

He paused a moment, for he had seen her face. For one moment he felt as if the riches of the world were his—as if nothing could matter now; a triumph, a pride which no adversity could tame. Let what might happen. Let him be in rags, and begging his bread; be compelled to stand aside and see other men surround her and court her, he knew now that other eyes she would meet with a proud indifference, let their power be what it might; but that his, let his station sink as low as it might, his could subdue her.

'Sara!' All the fire of his mother's land was in his eyes, and all its voluptuous music in his voice. 'You love me. You do not speak, but you tell me so. Look at me! Let me see it in your eyes once again, Sara, my love!'

There was exultation in his voice, and the

exultation thrilled her. His passion overmastered her, and almost terrified her, and yet it was rapture such as she had never dreamed of. Earth and heaven, with their deepest secrets, seemed suddenly opened to her—a flood of light over all.

'Look at me!' he exclaimed again, and it was more of a command than an entreaty.

'Jerome!' she said faintly, as he took her hands with gentle violence from before her face, and knelt on one knee beside her chair to do so. His 'Look at me!' rang in her ears; his eyes, which she felt were fixed upon her, attracted her irresistibly. Why was she so reluctant, so fearful of looking up? Perhaps because she knew that when their glances met her last power of concealment or resistance would be gone.

'Sara!' he whispered, and his voice, so near and so impassioned, at last compelled the look he demanded. Was it rapture, or was it pain—an agony of pain—that she felt? Was it the anguish of having to confess that she was mastered, conquered? She did not

know. As he clasped her in his arms, and pressed his lips upon her lips, and kissed her cheek, her hair, her closed eyes, she felt that it might be heaven indeed, but that her heart was breaking with the greatness of her joy. Perhaps to reach heaven—to finally pass through its inner portals—a heartbreak might be necessary.

'Do you remember when I was singing at Trockenau, and the countess thought I did it to oblige her?' he asked presently.

'Do I remember, Jerome? Shall I ever forget it? I have listened to no singing since. I could not, and would not.'

'I sang *Adeläida*, if you remember?' he said, but his eyes dwelt upon her face with an intentness which she felt to be almost tyrannous.

'Yes, and you sang "*Ich grolle nicht.*" Why did you sing that?' she said, with a kind of faint shudder. 'It is such a terrible song.'

'Why—I do not know. But tell me, was I right to come to-night?' he asked, per-

suasively. 'I fought a long battle with myself, as I told you. I was undecided up to the very moment of entering the house.'

'Right, yes! I say you were right, at least. What if you had gone to England without coming? What if I had never known—oh, Jerome, it is horrible to think of!'

'For me! I feel that I came to you a beggar, and that I sit here a king, and with more than a king's riches. I cannot repent.'

'Did you think there was something wrong in it?' she asked, anxiously.

'Wrong, no! Is it wrong to love the sun, and to go by preference where he shines? What I felt to be wrong was my coming to monopolise you—if I could persuade you to be monopolised by me—just when I have the least right to do so—when I can only say, "I love you, and always shall love you," but cannot say, "Come and be my wife at once."'

'Knowing that you love me, I can wait.'

she answered. 'Surely, the highest and best kind of love is that which sustains us through waiting and trouble—not that hideous parody of love which must not be spoken unless the lover can say at one and the same time, "I love you—I have got a house for you, and enough money to keep you—will you marry me?"'

'Rampant philistinism!' said Jerome. 'I had no idea before, that I had so much of it in me. You read me a lesson.'

'I will never believe but that your love is of a different fibre to that, Jerome. Never reproach yourself with having stolen a march upon me; but think rather that you have done a good deed in giving me the right not only to share all your hopes and fears, but to say that I share them, and to own to you that your joy is my joy, and your sorrow my sorrow.'

He had not seen the case in that aspect before, but he did not say so. The incense she burnt before him, of love and a subtle flattery, was sweet. It intoxicated him.

From his education and surroundings, he was incapable of telling himself that he was 'taking pity' on any woman. No vulgar parade of the love she felt for him was possible; but at the same time his most intense consciousness at this moment was, not that a proud, and noble, and good, and beautiful woman had given her happiness into his keeping, but that he had been right, she had loved him—he could bend her to his will.

Sara broke the pause which ensued by suddenly asking:

'Where is your sister? Tell me about her. What is she going to do while you are settling all your difficulties at home?'

'I left her at the Breidenbacher Hof. Yes, she is with me—my poor little Avice! What will become of her in England—in Manchester perhaps, in the smoke and fog, while I am cooling my heels in a lawyer's office?—for there will be no hurry about attending to my behests, my love. What she will be amusing herself with while I am

agreeably engaged in learning how much we have left to starve upon, I do not know.'

'Make me a promise!' said Sara. 'Show your devotion and your confidence by an unconditional promise at this very moment.'

'I promise, blindly, to do as you command.'

'Then I command you to leave your sister here with me, while you go home. When you are perfectly satisfied that you have found a place for her, such as you would wish her to be in, then you can come over here and fetch her. Till then, let her remain with me, and try whether she can learn to be my sister.'

'Sara, you must be inspired, I believe,' exclaimed Jerome. 'I could have asked no better boon—none as good, for her and for me. I will not deprecate such generosity. I take you at your word. Teach her only to be a little like yourself, and I shall find her perfect.'

'You will bring her to me to-morrow morning, will you not, before you go away?

What a joy it will be to have her! I know I shall love her, and I think I can make her love me; and it will bind your thoughts the faster to Elberthal,' she added, looking at him with a tender smile.

Jerome took one of her hands, and sat with it in his, as Sara closed her eyes, and leaned back in her chair, wearied with the excess of emotion she had gone through.

'God knows, it is a wrench though, to find all this wealth of love to-night, and to have to leave it in the morning,' muttered Jerome, darkly.

'God knows, it is!' echoed Sara.

'I have an undercurrent of feeling,' he went on, 'which makes me almost wish I had never crossed your path, nor linked your lot with mine. The whole future is so dark and troubled. You were so happy and at peace, and your art was all in all to you.'

'And you think now, I suppose, that you will dethrone my art. I think not, Jerome,' she answered, smiling rather proudly.

'Ah, you challenge me!' said he, smiling also, rather mournfully. 'Never forsake your art for me, Sara, for I am not worth it.'

'You are worthy my best and deepest love, and I shall give it to you,' she said, almost passionately. 'Jerome, do not trouble this night with these dark forebodings, and this self-depreciation. It is something new in you. I never imagined you troubled with doubts or difficulties.'

He made no answer, and they sat on thus in silence for a long time, until at last he rose.

'I must go to Avice,' he said. 'Good-night, my love.'

Long after he had gone, Sara sat in her low chair, unseeing the considerate glances cast towards her by Mrs. Nelson. She sat, trying to analyse her own sensations—trying to discover whether the happiness or the trouble at her heart was greatest. Once or twice lately, she had thought that could she but know certainly that he loved her, or

did not love her, she would at least have rest in the knowledge. Now, the knowledge was hers—his love was hers. But with love, not calm, but the very reverse, had come.

CHAPTER VIII.

'CONTENT THEE WITH ONE BITTER WORD, ADIEU!'

THE morning came, and with it, according to his promise, Jerome came to breakfast, bringing Avice with him. 'Try to persuade her to be pleased to stay with me,' Sara had said to him, to which he had naturally replied by an emphatic wonder as to what else than pleasure his sister possibly could feel at the prospect.

Sara was restless that morning. She wandered from her studio to her sitting-room, and back to her studio again. She had told Ellen that the gentleman who

had called last night would come to breakfast with his sister, and Mrs. Nelson had busied herself in preparing as *recherché* a repast as possible, placing fresh flowers on the table, and making everything look bright and festive.

'The gentleman was English, wasn't he, Miss Sara?' she asked.

'Yes, he was—is, I mean.'

'Then we'll show him that we know how to serve an English breakfast, nice, and bright, and choice; rather different from their pots of butter, and baskets of cobs, and a table-cloth, and a coffee-machine—that's about all they give you for breakfast in these parts,' said Mrs. Nelson, resentfully, for she had never got over the disgust she had experienced in partaking for the first time, and seeing her young lady partake, of a German breakfast, in the native boarding-house style.

Accordingly, the breakfast-table, in the shady corner of the room, was a refreshing spectacle; but Mrs. Nelson's eyes, despite

her seeming engrossment in her work, kept wandering towards her mistress, whose restlessness she had not failed to observe.

'Only the gentleman and his sister, Miss Ford?' she asked tentatively.

'Yes. And—Ellen!'

'Ma'am?'

'I want you to like Miss Wellfield very much, for she is coming to stay with me, for several months, at least.'

'Is she, ma'am? About how old is the young lady?'

'About sixteen. Ellen, you know how I trust your judgment—what confidence I have in you?'

'You have often proved it, Miss Sara, and I hope I shall always deserve it.'

'I know you will. Well, you will wait upon us at breakfast, and I wish you to notice both Mr. Wellfield and his sister well. I want your opinion about them.'

'I will do so, Miss Sara,' said Mrs. Nelson, to whom such proofs of confidence on her mistress's part were by no means

new. She had been the girl's closest attendant, most faithful servant, and most trusty friend from her earliest infancy. Mrs. Ford had committed her child to Ellen's care on her death-bed. She loved her lady with the devotion of a mother, and with the dog-like fidelity, as well, of an old, trusty, conservative retainer. Sara was accustomed to consult her upon all imaginable matters, save only those concerning the toilette, in which, she told Ellen, her tastes inclined to the sombre, 'to the good, old-fashioned dining-room furniture style, Ellen. Your dress always reminds me of maroon rep curtains.' Ellen knew as well as a woman can know, that there must be something between her mistress and this Mr. Wellfield of the nature of a love-affair. How far it had gone, she did not know. She shrewdly suspected that, sooner or later, she would hear more on the subject. It pleased Sara to enlighten her, at the present moment, on another point.

'Mr. Wellfield has had a great misfortune lately,' she said. 'His father is dead, and he

has lost his whole property and estate. He does not know what he may have to live upon, or if anything will be left. He is going to England to settle his affairs, and I have invited Miss Wellfield to stay with me in the meantime.'

'Yes, ma'am,' Ellen had just replied, when the two rings, following quickly one upon the other, announced the expected visitors. Ellen went downstairs to admit them. Sara paced up and down her parlour, thrilling with the sensation that Jerome was far more formidable now, when he had her secret in his keeping, than before, when at best he could only have guessed it.

They stood within the room. Sara felt her heart beating and her eyes swimming, but she discovered where Avice stood, and holding out her arms said, in a faltering voice:

'Has he told you? Will you come to me?'

'Oh, how good you are!' sobbed the girl, springing forward, throwing her arms about

her neck, and hiding her face on her shoulder. 'How very good you are!'

That was a pleasant meal, despite the cloud which hung over them, despite the unwelcome nature of Jerome's errand to Manchester. It was a pleasant, and almost merry meal; and yet a nervous one, as the minutes flew relentlessly by, and the time for departure approached more inevitably.

'I must see your atelier before I go. I came here on purpose, you know,' said Jerome; 'and we must go now,' he added, looking at his watch, 'for my time is short.'

They were alone in the studio. It was light, but sunless, for it faced north. It was bare, and yet furnished, like all studios. Two or three easels stood about—a number of unfinished canvases—some of the plaster masks and casts known as 'gyps;' and on a pedestal, a great jar of the blue and grey pottery they make about Coblenz, full of roses.

Jerome saw them. 'I must have one

of these,' said he, turning the jar round. 'Here is one—this Gloire de Dijon—more than a bud, but not yet fully blown. That is when a rose is more beautiful than at any other time. It is just like you,' he added, drawing it from the jar, and shaking the water from it. 'And now, Sara, what of the future?' he added, drawing her to him. 'Why do you always look at me as if you were half-afraid of me?' he added, gazing down into her fascinated eyes. 'Avice never does. Yours is not "perfect love" if it has not cast out fear.'

'Avice—you will never have the same rights over Avice that you have already over me,' she replied, tremulously.

Jerome smiled. The sensation he felt was not one of displeasure. How rapidly his nature had developed during the last six weeks, he little knew. His former cool indifference to most women had passed into passionate love for one—he did know that. What he did not know was that his love was of the masterful kind, not only delighting

to inspire devotion, but loving to subdue. He had said, 'Why do you look half-afraid of me?' in an almost reproachful tone, but in his own mind he did not reproach her with that shade of fear, or anxiety, or whatever it might be. He did not understand the weight and the force of her nature. He measured what was not shown of it by what was—her utmost capacities by the devotion and humility of her love for him. He knew from a thousand signs and tokens that she was proud to an exceeding degree, and sometimes imperious. The knowledge that he had tamed her, and the deprecating look which told him that here he was supreme, was sweet—boundlessly sweet. He would have given worlds for a week to spare here—a week in which to inhale these fumes of sweet-smelling incense.

'What claims have I over you, that I have not over my sister?' he asked, smiling still, looking down into her troubled grey eyes with the look which had haunted her ever since the first time she had met it. 'Legally,

I have far fewer claims, for until Avice is of age, she is as much in my power as if I were her father; whereas you——'

'I did not mean legally. I meant morally, of course; the rights that love gives, Jerome—the right to my thoughts and wishes, and life and hopes.'

'You have the same rights over me,' he said.

'And yet you do not look afraid of me, you mean. It is different, Jerome. Not that I am really afraid of you,' she added, looking up more confidently. 'And you said something about the future,' she went on, as her fingers played with the little locket and ring which hung at his watchguard.

'Ah, about the future—yes. Will you trust me, and wait?'

'Through everything, Jerome, most implicitly,' she replied, and this time there was no wavering in the glance which met his, full, open, and candid.

'And would you prefer it to be kept quiet, or made known?' he added; 'because I

wish to do exactly as you please in the matter.'

'Let us not mention it,' she replied slowly, and with downcast eyes. 'My friends are very few, Jerome. Let us have the comfort —you and Avice and me—of keeping it quite to ourselves. I hate to think of people speculating about it.'

'As you will. But suppose—how shall I put it? If it is imagined that you are free—Sara, you must know it is most improbable that no other man will ever wish to win you. Some one is sure to fall in love with you, and then——'

'It is most unlikely—most improbable,' she began, with a deep flush.

'That any other man in existence should have the bad taste to admire what I have ound so perfect and so desirable,' he said, sarcastically.

'My life is so quiet. I go out so little. Now, with Avice as my companion, and you to think of, I shall go still less.'

'That is sophistry, Sara. Look at me, and

tell me you honestly believe that, if you are supposed to be free, no man will ever care for you again ?'

'You are cruel to press it so. If such a thing should happen, it will not be my fault, and I should know how to set him right on the subject,' she said, proudly.

'Well—so be it! And now, my love, it must be good-bye, for my time is growing very short. Stay!' he added, and he unfastened from his watch-guard a little ring which hung to it. 'This was my mother's betrothal ring. Take it from me, in token that you are mine, and I am yours.'

He slipped it upon her finger. It was a hoop of sapphires—the stones which are emblematic of steadfastness and faith, and it had been given by his father to his mother. With that he took her in his arms, and kissed her good-bye in a long, sorrowful kiss ; then loosed her and took her to a chair.

'Stay there,' said he. 'It will only make it worse if you come out. I will send Avice to you.'

He was gone. She knew nothing more until she felt another pair of arms about her neck, and heard Avice's voice choked with tears :

'He has gone! What shall I do? Oh Jerome, *mein* Jerome!'

Then her own tears were loosened. The girls wept in one another's arms, and were comforted.

CHAPTER IX.

ELLEN'S OPINION.

IT was not until night, after Avice, wearied with sorrow and excitement, had gone to bed, that Sara, calling Mrs. Nelson to her, said :

'Well, Ellen, what do you think of my new arrangement? Are you pleased to have Miss Wellfield here?'

'Yes, indeed, ma'am. I never saw a sweeter young lady, nor one that was more of a real lady. She's one that it will be a pleasure to serve.'

'That is well, and I quite agree with you. And—Mr. Wellfield?'

There was a pause before Ellen said : 'It is much more difficult to judge of a gentle-

man, on the spot as it were; and for a woman, too. And then he is so much older.'

'I know. But you must have formed some opinion of him, Ellen. We never see anyone strange without some impression being made on our minds.'

'He is a noble-looking gentleman,' said Ellen, slowly. 'What piercing dark eyes he has; and such a presence, and such a voice—such an air, Miss Sara, if I might say so. One does not often see such gentlemen, and——'

'Well, Ellen?' said her mistress, resting her chin upon her hand, and looking fixedly at her, while her heart throbbed. Was he not all that, and more?

'I was thinking—Miss Sara, you must not think me impertinent. You are like my child, you know.'

'I know it. Go on.'

'I was thinking that he has a way and a look with him that must make it hard for any woman to withstand him, supposing he were making love to her.'

'And is that all?' Sara asked, almost indignantly; her heart falling, though she was herself at the moment so strongly under the influence of that 'way' and that 'look'—though he had been making love to her, and she had found resistance swept away like a straw down a strong current. 'Is that all? Ellen, you know you are evading my questions. You know that I want to know whether he looked high-minded and good.'

'And that is just what I cannot say, my dear. I cannot tell. He looks splendid—I know that. He looks a gentleman, and a very grand gentleman. And I saw nothing to make me think he would not be good. But, since you will know all, Miss Sara, I thought there was a look about his lips, as if he could be cruel on occasion.'

'Cruel, Ellen? What do you mean?'

'Nay, don't look at me in that way, ma'am! You would make me speak, and I'm bound to tell the truth, I don't mean that he looked as if he would hurt an animal, or wil-

fully torment anything, but he looked to me as if, supposing he was hard pressed, for instance, he could be cruel, and unscrupulous —as if he would gain his end, choose what he had to do to get to it.'

'Oh,' said Sara, with a somewhat nervous laugh, 'you mean that he has a very strong will. I hope indeed that he has, Ellen, for he will need it, I assure you.'

'Then I am very glad he *is* determined,' answered Ellen, briskly, as if anxious to have the subject disposed of. And Sara did not resume it, but she was that night in no humour for either work or play. She sat in her easy-chair beside the table on which stood her lamp, and thought and pondered until her brain seemed to ache.

Where was he now? How far advanced on his dreary way to England and Manchester? She knew nothing of the north of England. She only knew that Wellfield, where his lost home was, was in the north-east corner of the great manufacturing county, and that (so he had told her) it was a lovely

and fertile spot, surrounded on one side by bleak Yorkshire moors, and on others by great grimy manufacturing towns. Of course she had heard of the north of England towns, had met people who came from them, had passed through some of them years ago, on her way to Scotland with her father ; but all that region was a great unknown land to her, with, as it seemed, the one exception of Wellfield, which she had found upon an ordnance map, and had pictured in her heart, until it took up a great space in her imagination ; and for her 'the north' as applied to England, meant Wellfield. A ridiculous mental position no doubt, but one not entirely without precedent.

Well, she thought, he would soon be there. He had told her he intended to go to see the old place once again. Mr. Bolton, the new owner, would not be so churlish as to refuse him that grace. And he had promised to write and tell her about it.

'Cruel?' she thought, reflecting upon Ellen's words. 'I suppose that means resolute.

People sometimes have to be almost cruel. It is often apparent cruelty which is really the greatest kindness. Jerome could be most determined, I am certain. I have noticed a change myself, since—since his trouble. I daresay he could even be what Ellen would imagine cruel ; but if so, it would be because he thought it right.'

Meditating upon this thought and variations of it, she sat until far in the night.

It was several days before the two girls heard anything of Jerome, and meantime they were able to become better acquainted with one another. Sara was predisposed to love Avice, first because of her charming appearance, and next because she was Jerome's sister. As time went on, the qualities, mental and moral, of her new sister made her love her for herself. Avice at first stood in a little awe of Miss Ford, of her grand manner, and of her indifferent way of speaking of things which many persons, and most women especially, thought of the first importance. But very soon Sara's great

heart and large benevolent woman's nature fascinated the younger girl. The whole character of this new friend was so utterly different from the character which had hitherto overshadowed and stunted hers, that very soon the joy of the new influence pervaded her whole nature. Here every power was encouraged to expand to its utmost—here the cold question, 'What will persons of judgment say to it?' was never asked; only the question, 'Is it right or wrong?' or, by preference, 'Is it good and noble, or bad and base?' Things were looked at as they were, not as the world preferred to see them. Here was liberty in the most alluring guise—that of a beautiful woman who loved all things pure and of good report. Avice very soon began to worship her new guardian.

When at last the first letter from Jerome arrived, there was little in it of actual news. He wrote from the house of Mr. Netley, his father's solicitor, and said he had only just arrived there.

'I found one of his clerks waiting for me

with an invitation to go to his house, and stay there until this business is settled and the worst known. I therefore drove straight up to his place, which is three or four miles out of town; and I am writing this before dinner, while I wait for his return from business. But I could not wait when once there was a chance of writing to you.

'This Cottonopolis is a dismal hole—but such a rush along the streets. Such earnest, intent, money-making faces; shrewd, hard and ugly for the most part. As their owners bustle along the streets, I feel as if I were a member of an extinct species, suddenly resuscitated and plunged into the whirl of the working half of the nineteenth century—and I look the thing every inch, I don't doubt. I will write to-morrow as soon as ever I have had a conversation with Mr. Netley, and know my way a little better.'

He asked her to address everything for the present to Mr. Netley's offices, at 57, Canongate. And he added that he had rejoiced every hour since his arrival in

England, to know that Avice was where she was. 'Not here—I do not know what would have become of her here. I think of you both, constantly, and the thought is as it were a light unto my feet and a lamp unto my path. With it, Sara, there may be poverty and sorrow to contend with, but there will always be something to live for and something to hope for. And I say again, "God bless you!" '

With the receipt of this letter it was as if one stage of a journey had come to an end. The door of a former life of luxury and careless ease had been closed and barred, and before them all lay a rugged path to be travelled, and moreover the light that shone upon it was so vague and uncertain that it was difficult to follow in its windings.

STAGE II.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT MR. NETLEY SAID.

ALONG, dree journey by that very unsavoury route to and from the Continent—Rotterdam and Harwich—and Jerome Wellfield, on the morning after his parting from his sister and sweetheart, found himself in London. He had nothing to do there—no business in the great city—no means, no right to take any pleasure in the same. He made his way from the Liverpool Street Station to that at Euston Square, where he found he had some two

hours to wait before the express to Irkford should start.

Who does not know the dreariness of such hours of waiting, weary, travel-worn and alone, in some great wilderness of a city station? They were the two most dismal hours he had ever passed.

At last, at eleven in the forenoon, the train to Manchester started. Jerome cast himself into a second-class compartment, and with weary eyes saw, when he was not half-dozing, 'the happy autumn fields' through which the express rushed smoothly and swiftly, and with slackened speed at last rolled into that cheering and inspiriting terminus, the London Road Station, Manchester.

From Ems—even from Elberthal—to Manchester! The contrast just flashed across his mind as he alighted.

A clerk presently accosted him inquiringly, 'Mr. Wellfield?' and then gave him a note which he carried. The note was a kindly, pleasant one from Mr. Netley, begging him to go to his house, and make it his head-

quarters until his business in Manchester was settled. Business prevented him from coming to the station himself and taking his guest home, but he would be in to dinner at seven. The address was given, and he hoped his clerk would bring word that Mr. Wellfield was on his way to 'Birch Lodge.'

With the sensation that this was true friendliness, Jerome bade the youth tell Mr. Netley that he accepted his invitation with many thanks, and, getting into a cab, gave the address, and was driven to Mr. Netley's house—his 'box,' as he called it in his note.

For a bachelor's box it was remarkably roomy and comfortable. The housekeeper had evidently expected the guest, and led him upstairs to the room prepared for him. Declining her offer of refreshments, he was left alone, with exactly two hours on his hands before dinner-time. Part of the time he employed in writing that letter to Sara which has already been spoken of—the rest in meditations, not particularly agreeable, on his

'present condition and future prospects.' During the few hours he had been in England he had felt a distinctly stronger chagrin and disappointment at the idea of the utter loss of home than he had yet experienced. He could not understand nor account for this feeling, but it was there, and it was strong. He felt a sudden rush of indignation at the manner in which he had been all these years cheated and hoodwinked—and that by his father. This Mr. Bolton, who now reigned at the Abbey—who and what was he? The desire to visit the place once more grew stronger. Wild schemes for becoming rich, and having the place back again, ran riot in his mind—chimerical schemes, for, as each one rose and fell, he had to tell himself again and again that each was vanity. In England—in this part of England especially—the way in which men made fortunes was that of trade and successful speculation. He knew absolutely nothing of trade, and had not the remotest idea in what 'speculation' consisted. He saw no way at all of becoming

rich. He saw the most probable and the best fate he could expect rise up and stand very clearly before his mental eyes—a secretaryship, clerkship, or something of that kind—neither of them avocations in which, as a rule, money is very rapidly accumulated.

In the midst of these agreeable meditations the dinner-bell rang, and he went downstairs and found his host standing in the hall, looking out for him—a grey-haired, round-faced, pink-cheeked, elderly man, with a bland smile and an amiable expression.

His appearance for some reason caused Jerome a kind of shock, he had unconsciously expected something so different. The climax of disillusion and commonplace appeared to have been reached when Mr. Netley, shaking hands with him and smiling benevolently, said he was sure Mr. Wellfield wanted his dinner. With his usual *sang froid*, Jerome, after a momentary pause, smiled slightly, and said 'Yes,' he was very hungry. They went into the dining-room, and here Mr. Netley volunteered the remark

that he thought business had better wait until after dinner, to which Jerome again yielded a cordial assent, and they took their places—Jerome with an ever-deeper suspicion that somehow Mr. Netley was not—the only word he could think of was, 'sharp'—that, for a solicitor of his standing, he was decidedly not very sharp.

'Have you ever been in Manchester before?' asked Mr. Netley.

'As a child, I may. Never since I grew up; nor, indeed, in any place like it.'

'Ah! it's an odd kind of place. Very thorough-going—strong political views, you know.'

'Yes, I suppose so. Not that I know anything about politics; I never took the slightest interest in them.'

'No? Not been thrown in the way of that kind of thing, I suppose?'

'Not at all. All my friends have been musical, or literary, or artistic people—or, nothing in particular, like myself.'

'I see. Well, there is a section in Man-

chester that goes in for art, and music, and that kind of thing. We've very fine music here—concerts, you know—a great many concerts, in the season.'

'Yes, I suppose everyone has heard that Manchester is a music-loving town.'

'Exactly so,' said Mr. Netley, looking cheered at this admission. 'And then there are literary people too, you know, and scientific—oh, many scientific people, whom I don't know much about. And there are some artists, too. There's a School of Art —there are a great many pupils at the School of Art, and an exhibition every year of their paintings.'

'Only *their* paintings?' inquired Jerome, politely.

'Oh, and other people's paintings, of course. Yes; and a Black and White Exhibition. Do you care for black and white pictures? Have you been much thrown amongst black and white artists—I mean artists who do black and white pictures?'

'Not more than amongst artists who do

red, and green, and blue, and other coloured pictures in general,' replied Jerome, beginning to feel a little amused, and to realise that probably Mr. Netley was one of those persons who have one manner and set of expressions for business hours, and quite another for those of leisure.

So it proved. When they went into the library, and Mr. Netley began to talk on business, it must have been a very clever man indeed who could have caught him tripping, or who could have discovered any want of perspicacity or acumen in his utterances.

They sat together in the study, with cigars and coffee-cups before them, and Mr. Netley had pulled out some papers, and begun to turn them over, when Jerome, whose impatience had been none the less keen in that he had so strenuously concealed it, said:

'Before you go into details, I wish you could give me one piece of information. Will there be anything left? Will there be enough just to give my sister a home? That is what I am most anxious to know.'

'There will be Monk's Gate, and I think from a hundred to a hundred and twenty pounds' income. Curate's pay, Mr. Wellfield, and a curate might make it do.'

'You are thinking I am not one. That's true. But this is a great relief. And Monk's Gate—what is Monk's Gate?'

'Your father only sold the Abbey, not Monk's Gate.'

'Monk's Gate, I conclude, is a house. I don't seem to have any remembrance of it.'

'It is the little dower-house belonging to the Abbey. It is close to the large outer gate—Monk's Gate they always called it.'

'I think I remember.'

'The old fellows used to use that gate. They went out through it into the fields to fish in the river. They knew what they were about, those old grey-frocks. Show me an abbey that was not built on a site at once fertile, rich, and beautiful. I defy you, sir.'

'There was Whitby—it's the only one I

can remember; but it always struck me as being rather bleak,' observed Jerome.

'Well, Whitby, I grant you. But that was a nunnery. Women like to make themselves uncomfortable for the sake of religion, or what they think religion. But that's neither here nor there, and if you are ready, I'll go a little into detail.'

Jerome absently assented, and Mr. Netley was privately thinking, with some contempt:

'He's the old Wellfields all over again. Let him only be secure of what will keep him from absolute beggary, and he'll sit down with it, rather than stir a finger. The only time at which you could arouse that race to a transient activity, was when they were absolutely hard-up. When there wasn't a coin in the house, they would suddenly drop their pride, and descend to any expedient to stave off personal inconvenience and discomfort. And the most unscrupulous of the whole lot was this lad's father. This fellow, it strikes me, has all the pride and all the laziness of

the breed, but not their dishonesty, I should say. Mother's blood, perhaps.'

Jerome must have been gratified indeed, could he have known his host's opinion of him.

There was not very much to be explained. It seemed that Mr. Wellfield had sold the Abbey about seven years ago, when Jerome was nineteen and Avice nine years of age. Mr. Netley explained about the ways in which the purchase-money had been invested, and how the bank failure had come about, which had brought the crash. He was a little surprised, and his theory as to Jerome's want of character was shaken, when the young man said:

'It seems to me that in any case, on my father's death, I should have been reduced to poverty, for, had the money been remaining, I should have made it my first object to regain the Abbey—if I had had to spend every farthing to do so.'

'You would have found it no easy task, Mr. Wellfield. Mr. Bolton is greatly attached

to the place, and I don't think any price would tempt him.'

Jerome winced—it was galling in the extreme to have to hear of this man in possession with so firm a grasp upon what he had always regarded as his. He hated the thought, and once again, stronger than ever, the desire rushed over him to oust the usurper from his place. And once again succeeded the recoil, the miserable sense of poverty and helplessness, of impotency, which made his temples throb and his blood boil. He sat, with knitted brows, in moody silence, till at last he asked abruptly :

'And this Monk's Gate—is it habitable ?

'Oh, I should say so. I believe there is even some antiquated furniture in it.'

'I shall go over and see it, at any rate, before I decide upon anything else.'

'Very well. The key is in my keeping at my office. You shall have it. You shall judge for yourself. Meantime, don't be in any hurry to leave me. Turn things well over in your mind before you decide to live

at Monk's Gate, or anywhere else. I will do all I can to help you forward.'

'You are very kind,' said Jerome, still absently, his mind still vaguely reaching out after some path from his difficulties.

Before going to sleep, he added a post-script to his letter to Sara.

'Netley tells me he thinks there will be a pittance left, which makes my mind easier with respect to my sister. Ah, my love, I never realised till this night, the *power* of money. The want of it makes me feel unscrupulous.'

CHAPTER II.

MONK'S GATE.

IT was a glorious afternoon in the beginning of August, on which Wellfield left Manchester for his two hours' journey to Wellfield, to arrive at which spot he had to pass through some of the roughest, dirtiest, richest and most prosperous of the numerous manufacturing towns of Lancashire.

Burnham was the last of these towns—a place of great size, great riches, and of an absolutely stupendous ugliness—a great collection of ugly, grimy buildings, paved streets, and ghastly-looking tall chimneys, the whole planted at the bottom of a hollow which had

once been as fair as valley could be, in the rough, stony moorland style of sparkling stream and rugged rock. Even now, when the veil of smoke permitted one to see them, high and beautiful hills might be perceived, blue, calm and eternal. The prospect of them gave one a longing to ascend them, and from their summits to breathe an air which should be free and pure.

After Burnham came one or two little wayside stations, and then Wellfield. The railway here ran over a high viaduct, much raised above the village. Jerome felt his heart throb as he looked out, and saw below him on the right, slumbering amid orchard trees and some fine old elms, some ancient brown walls, two vast and massive gateways —a broken line which showed where the cloisters had formerly run beside the river. That was the Abbey, which, with its grounds, took up pretty nearly as much space as all the rest of the village put together. He saw the calm river gliding by; then raised his eyes to where in sturdy pride old Penhull

stretched his great carcase, shutting all in to the east. It was a fair land—it was a goodly heritage, and his heart was bitter within him.

The train stopped, and he got out and stood on the platform. He was a stranger there. No one took the least notice of him. He found himself at the farther end of the little platform, and before walking forward to leave the station, he paused and looked round him. From the place where he now stood, the Abbey was not visible. He was looking in another direction, towards the north-west. Behind him rose the great wall of Penhull, over which his ancestors in the good old days had helped King Jamie to hunt witches with vigour and malignity. Before him he saw a more level country, spreading towards an ancient town called Clyderhow, with its quaint old castle. Farther to the west came some other long-backed fells, on the other side of which was St. George's Channel: and nearer, on the brow of one of the said fells, some three miles

away, he saw faintly the grey tower of an ancient church, and just above that, where the ground began to rise towards the western fells, a long, large, imposing building of whitish stone, exquisitely situated, and from its commanding position, a landmark for miles around. This was the great Jesuit college of Brentwood, which had once belonged to a branch of the Wellfield family, in the days when they were great men and devout Catholics.

Jerome's eyes fell upon it, and with the sight of it came the remembrance of his having, years ago, met a certain priest belonging to that establishment.

'That was more than seven years ago,' he reflected, 'before the Abbey had been sold to this *roturier*. I must have been a mere lad then, but how well I remember him! What was his name? Somerville, surely. Yes. Pablo Somerville. I remember. He was half Spanish — there was some mystery about his father, I recollect. What a musician he was — and a gentleman, if

ever there was one. Will it be my luck, I wonder, to renew the acquaintance? One might meet with a worse fate than some of those fellows at Brentwood have, after all, for——'

'Ticket, sir, please,' said a curt voice at his elbow. Jerome roused himself, took his eyes off Brentwood, and went along the platform, down a little slanting path, which brought him into a road. Here he met a man, and asked him if he knew where Monk's Gate was.

'Dun yo mean th' heawse, or th' yate itsel'?' inquired the man.

'I mean the house.'

'Well, yo' mun go through th' yate for to get to th' heawse. Yon's t' shortest road,' he pointed down a grassy lane with trees on either side. 'Keep down thur, and then turn to th' left, and yo' conna miss th' Monk's Gate, 'cause it straddles o' across th' road, and yo' mun go under it, and turn in at th' first gate to your left. Yon's t' Monk's Gate House. But it's empty, and locked oop,' he

added, looking inquiringly at the person who had an errand to Monk's Gate.

'I know. I have the key.'

'M' appen you belong to 't ?'

'It belongs to me,' responded Jerome. 'Good-day, and thank you.' With which he walked on, leaving his interlocutor to stare after him, scratch his head, and remark to himself:

'Well, I'm dom'd! It mun be John Wellfield's lad. Eh, but I mun go and tell 'em about this 'ere down at th' Black Bull.'

Jerome, meantime followed the directions he had received, and soon found the cavernous-looking remains of Monk's Gate, 'straddling,' as his guide had said, 'o' across t' road,' a huge, grim, ivy-covered portal, showing, by its distance from the rest of what were now the Abbey grounds, what a great and glorious possession this said Abbey had once been.

A little way on the other side of the archway to the left, was a gate, leading into a

garden ; there was a gravel drive going up to a low quaint-looking grey stone house. This, then, must be Monk's Gate.

It was a wilderness of a garden, with a large, irregularly shaped lawn, of a velvety softness and greenness, which neglect had not yet ruined. In the very centre of this lawn rose a high, thin old pear-tree. Scattered about were other kinds of fruit-trees. Broad borders of all sweet and old-fashioned flowers were filled with a rank luxuriance of plants, some blooming, some not yet in bloom ; others almost choked to death by their more flourishing neighbours. On the left of the broad walk was a high wall, and behind the wall fine beech-trees which cast the shade of their ample boughs far into the garden of Monk's Gate. The house itself stood back ; it looked a small house for such a large, luxuriant garden. It was very low, Jerome saw, with odd-looking windows half-hidden by roses and clematis, while all over the left side of the house, a flourishing ivy revelled healthily. He approached nearer.

Just before the house was a great bush of the Gloire de Dijon rose—the fragrance of its second crop that year filled the air for yards around.

Drawing forth the key which Mr. Netley had given him, he applied it to the door, and its rattle in the lock was the first sound to break the almost oppressive hush and stillness, and deadly calm of everything around and about. The lock turned somewhat rustily and unwillingly. It required him to exert the strength of both his hands to induce it entirely to yield. Then he pushed the door open, stepped in, and stood beneath all that he could now call his own roof-tree. A narrow passage—a door to the left, which he passed; the passage was only a few feet long; one stepped out of it, without door or other intervening ceremony, into a large, low, raftered room, with a high old wooden chimney-piece, deep oaken cupboards sunk in the walls, a long, very low window, with a deep, roomy seat in it—a heavy oaken table in the centre of the room, and, at one side,

an ancient, shabby, comfortable-looking settee. In a remote corner there was a pile of old furniture, which in its dirt and shabbiness looked remarkably like lumber.

Jerome gazed round the room. Despite the age and decrepitude of all in it, it had a certain attraction for him, from its quaint, unconventional shape and arrangements. The stairs, with old oaken rails and balustrade, led straight out of it. A door which he opened, showed him a roomy kitchen, with a back-kitchen beyond. Turning back, he opened the door to the left of the passage, which he had not yet explored, and found a second sitting-room, smaller than the first, but just as quaint, low and irregular. This room, too, had the agreeable peculiarity of a corner fireplace, and it contained more furniture than the other ; very old drawing-room furniture—thin-legged chairs and tables, and a strange-looking thing which was at once cupboard, cabinet, and press, to match the rest of the furniture, which was mahogany. The aforesaid thin-legged chairs were up-

holstered in a sickly, faded drab damask—relic of a bygone day. The whole place looked like some grave, and yet a grave about which lingered gentle memories, like a soft perfume; recollections of old-fashioned ladies who must have spent countless hours at their tambour-frames, embroidering those elaborate and now pale and faded semblances of pink-cheeked shepherds and blue-eyed shepherdesses which adorned some spindly-looking stools and spider-legged 'occasional' chairs. Whose slender fingers had accomplished that triumph of worsted-work which covered a large settee beneath one of the two little deep square windows—a piece of worsted-work with a whole picture upon it, of an elaborate landscape; figures, fountains, sheep, and marble vases?

Jerome passed his hand across his eyes, feeling as if he had lost his identity. Was it—could it be he, Jerome Wellfield, who was standing in this chill, pale, silent place, inhaling the faint, musty, dusty smell, which carries one back full a hundred years; and

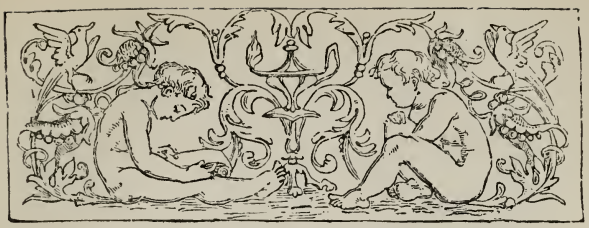
was this dim old place his home—all the home he now had? He tried to picture Avice there, and succeeded. It would be no inappropriate place for her, he felt, when fires should have dried up all the damp, and when all this faded furniture should have been pulled forth, cleaned, and polished, and arranged. And Sara? Try as he would, he failed to see her there. And yet, he knew that should he ask her to come, she would do so.

He climbed the stairs, and found several bedrooms, corresponding with the rooms below—all with the same raftered roofs, and odd little square windows, made almost dark, too, by the overhanging trailing-plants which covered the side of the house.

He lingered long, unaccountably attracted and fascinated. In such a quiet nook a man might drone out his life, and soon be utterly forgotten—might live on from year to year, and watch the seasons come and go, the flowers bloom and fade, and spring again; might observe the sunlight and the storm-shadows sweep across the broad sides of

Penhull, and might at last die and be carried to the graveyard which spread around the old church—might there be laid to his rest, and none be the wiser.

He shivered slightly, as he vividly pictured all this; then, slowly descending the stairs, went out—how hot and balmy the outside air felt, after the dampness of the house!—locked the door behind him, and bent his steps towards the Abbey.



CHAPTER III.

THE NEW MAN AND THE OLD ACRES.

WELLFIELD had only a very short distance to walk before he came to another great cavernous archway, the 'Abbot's Gate,' and the second principal entrance to the Abbey. Great beech-trees clustered around it. It was quite dark and cool and gloomy, but a little door in the great wooden gates stood open, and gave him a curious little oblong glimpse into a sunny courtyard, where everything stood still and hot and quiet, and in which, as he stepped into it, there was not a sign of life. One side of the Abbey building, what was left of it, faced him; the windows looked into this

paved court, and appeared to be windows of offices, kitchens, etc. Green tubs, filled with a blaze of scarlet geraniums, made brilliant spots of colour here and there. To the left was a high wall, and a fine old stone archway. He knew the way well. Through that archway he must pass to go round to the front entrance of the house, which was chiefly composed of what had once been the private apartments of the abbots of Wellfield. He glanced up at the top of the archway and saw, on the oblong slab which was let into it, the legend, 'J. W., 15—.' It stood for John Wellfield, as he knew; the said John having been the first Wellfield who had taken up his abode in the Abbey, after its demolishment under the glorious dispensation of Henry VIII.

'My initials!' murmured Jerome. 'I wonder this man has not rent out the stone, and inscribed his own instead.'

This was rather a bitter thought, and, with his mind full of it, he passed under the archway, and found himself in a grand old garden

—such a garden as those ancient monks knew how to make; and a garden which, since their time, had been lovingly kept up. It was formal—all laid out in oblongs and squares, but it had an indescribable beauty and grace. Great trees took away from the stiffness; brilliant flowers and intensely green grass made it gay. Under the trees to the right were some clumps of tall, fiery-looking gladioli. Straight before the house the ground sloped to the river, beside which was a long grassy walk and avenue, and a little farther to the right, still beside the river, the hoary cloisters. Jerome's heart was exceeding bitter within him, as he saw and realised all the beauty of the place, which came back to him, after sixteen years, with a familiarity which was startling. The sixteen years were but 'as yesterday.' As he stood there, he felt it his—his own; the effort to conceive of it as belonging to some one else was a painful one—one which did not altogether succeed.

'He *sold* it!' he was thinking to himself. 'Sold it in cold blood. Why, if he had told

us the truth, and kept it, he should have been happy; we would have made him happy here, let our poverty have been what it might.'

He walked up the round space of smoothly-rolled gravel before the deep entrance-door, and rang the bell.

Mr. Bolton, he was told, was at home. Jerome sent in his card, and was shown into a room which he well remembered. It had formerly been the library, and appeared to be still used for the same purpose, though greatly changed from its old condition. It was not very vulgar, indeed one might almost have pronounced it not at all vulgar; but all the things were comparatively new, and evidently 'of the very best.' But the furniture was well chosen and appropriate; had Mr. Bolton or had his upholsterer chosen it? Jerome wondered, in a parenthesis as he looked around, and felt that the appearance of the room displayed a desire at least, if not a perfectly accomplished one, on the part of those who owned it, to be tasteful—a desire which he felt had resulted in being proper

and philistine. He glanced at some books on the table, and at one or two in the book-shelves, and was struck at finding them to be nearly all confined to two classes—voyages and travels, and Italian books, the latter almost all bearing some reference to Dante, or to Dante's great poem.

'Odd!' thought Jerome, and as he thought it, the door was opened, and Mr. Bolton entered.

A man of medium height, and of moderate proportions, with a round, obstinate-looking head, dark complexion, brown eyes, a mouth with a protruding under-lip, and an all-pervading expression of shrewdness, and strong, powerful common-sense. A prejudiced, one-sided man, one would suppose, but a man who required a considerable mental space in which to display his onesidedness and prejudice—a man with great faults, and great virtues, possibly; with a bull-dog expression, betokening tenacity of mind—what this man once grasped, he would not easily let loose again.

Jerome felt the last fact strongly, if he did not understand, as indeed he could not possibly do, the other characteristics. There was nothing handsome about Mr. Bolton; very little to be praised in his manner, no grace in his gestures; but there was a certain rough dignity about him, which was even imposing. He was a commanding spirit, if not an enlightened one.

'Mr. Wellfield, I think?' he said, fixing his deep-set, dark eyes upon Wellfield's face, but not betraying, by either look or expression, that he was particularly struck in any way by his visitor.

'Yes,' said Jerome, bowing; 'I presume you are Mr. Bolton?'

'The same. Will you not be seated?'

Jerome had been standing in one of the windows. At Mr. Bolton's suggestion he took a chair, and a feeling curiously akin to mortification began to steal over him. Mr. Bolton was so very evidently the master-spirit here. Wellfield felt himself so entirely reduced to the level of a stranger—a mere

casual caller, in his old home, that at first he could hardly speak.

How was he to introduce himself? How account for his presence there, for he had come in his usual half-dreaming manner: with no set aim or purpose—no clear and tangible excuse; driven only by a longing to see the place, and by a half-acknowledged feeling of defiant unwillingness to be deterred by this stranger from stepping into the house which he persistently looked upon as 'his by right.' It has been said that when the elder Wellfield sent his son into the world, he had not overburdened him with moral maxims for his guidance. Jerome had been left to decide upon his own ethical code—a plan which has its snares and pitfalls as well as its advantages. Mr. Bolton's calm presence of mind, and his evident ease and pleasure in his surroundings, caused a strange pang to Wellfield, and roused a feeling of resentment at once unreasonable and ridiculous. And yet, he felt, he must be courtesy itself, or all his own feelings and ideas as to what was his due would not

prevent the usurper from somewhat unceremoniously casting him forth.

'You may think this a strange intrusion on my part,' he began, on the spur of the moment. 'Indeed, I begin to think myself that it is.'

'As to that, I can say nothing, Mr. Wellfield, until I hear your errand. In the meantime, I do not think it strange at all that you should call at the Abbey if you were in this neighbourhood.'

'You have no doubt heard of my father's death?'

'I have, and indirectly, of his losses—which, I suppose, will be your losses. I was sorry to learn about them.'

Jerome bowed slightly. 'It is in consequence of those losses that I am here. I learnt from Mr. Netley, my solicitor, that the Monk's Gate house still belongs to me, and I came over here to see if it could be made habitable. I could not resist coming on to see the old place of all—trusting to your kindness to allow me to stroll round once or twice.'

'One can hardly call such a visit a strange intrusion,' observed Mr. Bolton, and Jerome had remarked that though his voice was curt, and his accent provincial, yet that his language was proper, and even pedantic sometimes, and his grammar unimpeachable.

'You are at liberty to "stroll round," as you call it, as much as you please. I don't pretend not to know that such an excursion must be painful to you—if you ever cared for the place—and from your making this visit, I conclude you did.'

'I did, and do,' answered Wellfield.

'Then, though it may not be agreeable to you to know it in the possession of other people, you will not be sorry to find that it is as well-cared for as if it were your own.'

Jerome was not sorry, but he felt galled, deeply galled, to have to realise so completely how impotent he was in the matter—how this man had the power, not only to keep everything trim, but to alter and change, and upset everything, if it so pleased him.

'I am glad to know that,' he said, and Mr. Bolton went on.

'May I ask if you intend to settle at Wellfield? Do you mean to live at Monk's Gate?'

'So far as I can see at present, I do,' said Jerome, who, as a matter of fact, had only begun to think such a thing advisable, since he had seen Monk's Gate. 'But I do not know. Mr. Netley gives me to understand that my sister and I will have something to live upon. I shall, however, seek employment, which it is not always an easy matter to find. Until I do find it, I shall probably live at Monk's Gate.'

Mr. Bolton bowed his head. 'Do you think of staying here long, now?' he asked.

'I came without any definite intention, for I did not know what sort of a place Monk's Gate was. Now I think I shall go to the inn here, if there is one, and stay perhaps a day or two, until I get things in order. And —they tell me Burnham is a very large town,

and that trade there is now very good. Perhaps——'

'Ah, you are thinking you might happen to find some employment there. It is possible. But pray do not think of putting up at the inn while there is room at the Abbey. We shall be glad if you will stay with us, as long as you find it convenient.'

'Who may we be?' wondered Jerome, as he hesitated. There was not much cordiality in the invitation, but a sedate sincerity, as if Mr. Bolton performed a duty which might have been pleasanter, and might also have been more unpleasant. One thing was quite certain. Whether he would be glad or not to have Wellfield at his own home, he would be very sorry to see him at the inn. He saw the hesitation, and repeated his invitation, this time more cordially.

'You are very kind,' said Wellfield. 'It looks so very much as if I had come on purpose——'

'I do not know why you came, I am sure, but I trust you will stay with us. Since you

are so near Burnham, it would be foolish to go back to Manchester without at least making an effort to seek some employment there. And there is no one in the world who knows so much about Burnham as I do.'

Jerome thanked him, and accepted the invitation. Mr. Bolton rose.

'That is settled,' he remarked. 'Come into the garden, and we'll find Nita there.'

'Who is Nita?' again speculated Wellfield, and he followed his host without a word.

Mr. Bolton took his way through the garden towards the avenue by the river, which was called 'the river walk.' As they entered this walk, Jerome perceived in the distance an arrangement of chairs and a table, some light shawls, books, parasols, and two female figures, seated in low cane chairs, under the trees. Both these ladies were reading, and apparently engrossed in their books. The footsteps of the men along the soft grass made no sound, and neither lady looked up until Mr. Bolton, in a voice

from which all hardness and abruptness appeared to have melted suddenly, said:

'Nita!'

Then both the parasols were lowered, and Jerome saw that a very young lady, and a decidedly elderly one, sat side by side beneath the trees. The young lady looked first at both of them, then at Wellfield in particular, and as she slowly rose, with a faint, half-smile, her face seemed all large brown eyes. As he came nearer, he saw that she had, too, a beautiful forehead, broad, and rather low; red lips which looked as if they would readily smile, and pale cheeks. He saw that she only just attained medium height; that she was slight, yet not thin in figure, and graceful, in a certain quaint, picturesque, unconventional style—a great contrast to the stiff, upright, elderly figure beside her, with a grey keen face, compressed lips, and piercing, cold grey eyes. The second lady made no attempt at rising. She sat perfectly still, and bolt upright, folded her mittened hands one over the other

upon her book, and looked at Jerome Wellfield in a manner which he felt to be pointed.

'Nita,' repeated Mr. Bolton, 'I've brought you a visitor; Mr. Jerome Wellfield, who will stay with us a short time. My daughter, Mr. Wellfield, and my cousin, Miss Margaret Shuttleworth.'

Nita Bolton smiled, shook hands with the guest, and said, 'How do you do?'

Miss Shuttleworth stiffly inclined her head, but did not make any overtures towards shaking hands.

'Will you not sit down, Mr. Wellfield?' said Nita, pointing to a chair, which he took, and she went on:

'Have you just arrived in Wellfield?'

'I arrived about an hour and a half ago. I have been looking at my house—Monk's Gate.'

'Oh, have you? It is a pretty little house.'

'Very. So humble and unobtrusive-looking,' said Jerome.

'And damp,' observed Miss Shuttleworth; and though she did not speak loudly, she spoke in a manner which made it impossible to ignore her remarks. Indeed, whenever Miss Shuttleworth spoke, an impartial observer must have said that she put a portentous amount of expression into her utterances.

'You think it is damp?' said Jerome, politely turning to her, while Nita's colour rose, and her fingers trifled nervously with her watch-chain.

'I know it to be damp,' responded Miss Shuttleworth, in a manner which Jerome, unaccustomed to her as he was, felt imperatively called for a reply, or another question of some kind.

'So damp as to make it unadvisable to live there?' he inquired.

'I should say it was a most unhealthy house to live in. If you *wish* to become rheumatic at once, and to grow old before your years, by all means live at Monk's Gate.'

'As it is all the home I now possess,' re-

sponded Jerome, 'it is probable that I shall live there, despite the disadvantages you mention.'

'All the home you possess?' repeated Nita, and Jerome turned to her with a sense of pleasure in the contrast between her and her relative.

Miss Shuttleworth absolutely revolted him with her plainness, her hard features, her metallic voice, and her unengaging manner. In comparison, Nita, though not a beauty, looked charming. He met her soft brown eyes with pleasure, and saw the slight shyness, the little air of timidity and shrinking, with feelings of complacency. At this juncture Mr. Bolton rose, remarking:

'Well, I'll leave Mr. Wellfield to you to entertain. I have some writing to do. I suppose I shall see you at supper, Margaret?'

'Not to-night, thank you. I have my Bible class, and shall have to go in about an hour.'

'Oh, well, come to-morrow, or as often as

you can, at any rate,' he answered ; and with a general inclination of the head to the company, he departed.

Jerome looked after him, as he went down the river walk, and realised that the whole figure, though plebeian, was powerful, not without a certain air, too, of dignity and command. He turned to Nita again.

'Mr. Bolton has very kindly asked me to stay a few days at the Abbey, until I have decided what to do with Monk's Gate, or rather until I see whether I can find some employment, which will allow me to live at Monk's Gate, as I hope to do.'

'Yes,' said Nita, with a look of embarrassment ; 'but—but—I suppose I ought not to say it——'

'If it is a personal question, Nita, to a total stranger, you ought certainly *not* to say it,' here chimed in Miss Shuttleworth's voice.

Nita blushed furiously, and Jerome said, more in the hope of annoying Miss Shuttleworth than from any other reason :

'I am sure it is no question that is not perfectly justifiable, Miss Bolton, and therefore I promise in advance to answer it.'

'It was not exactly a question. You speak of Monk's Gate as your only home, and of seeking employment; but I thought you were rich, Mr. Wellfield.'

'So did I, until a short time ago. I am just now in the process of learning completely to realise my mistake. I am a poor man, and am not quite certain that the wreck of my fortunes will leave me enough to enable me to bring my sister to Monk's Gate, and make her a home there.'

'Have you a sister?' asked Nita, who kept giving him very rapid, momentary glances, her eyes leaving his face almost before they had had time to find it, which glances he met with a calm, prolonged gaze, which did not escape the steely eyes of Miss Shuttleworth.

'I have a sister—yes.'

'Is she with you?'

'No; she is at Elberthal, in Germany, with a friend.'

'How old is she?'

'Sixteen.'

'Is she pretty?'

'She is considered beautiful, I believe.'

'Like you at all?' inquired Miss Shuttleworth, with a treacherous suavity in her tones.

Jerome burst out laughing, and Nita blushed fiercely.

'Oh, aunt, how uncomfortable you make me!' she exclaimed vehemently.

Miss Shuttleworth made no reply, then Nita went on:

'I hope it is not rude of me, but are you and your sister alone in the world?'

'We are, quite.'

'And very fond of one another?'

'Y—yes.'

'That is, your sister is very fond of you,' remarked Miss Shuttleworth.

'I hope she is, and that she may never

have cause to be otherwise,' he replied politely.

'It is very interesting!' said Nita, with a little sigh, while Jerome thought, repressing a smile, what an amusing story it would make for Sara and Avice.

'What is your sister's name?' next asked Nita.

'Avice.'

'Avice? What a peculiar name.'

'It means "refuge," ' observed Miss Shuttleworth.

'Oh, does it?' said Jerome, 'I didn't know that.'

'Do you think you will like living in England?' pursued Nita.

'No, I don't, under the circumstances.'

She shook her head, and maintained silence. Miss Shuttleworth rose from her chair.

'I must go,' she remarked. 'And do you go in too, Nita, soon. The damp rises from the river in the evening, and you have a thin dress on.'

'I shall not be long.'

'I am going to take this book with me. It is a very clever story. Where did you get it?'

'John brought it me from London. I haven't read it. I saw a review of it in the——, which made me think it was stupid.'

Miss Shuttleworth's lips relaxed into a smile which was sardonic. This was a topic on which she evidently felt strongly.

'Why do you and John and your father persist in reading reviews?' she asked, with asperity. 'The book stupid?—as likely as not it was the reviewer who was stupid. *I* know them. It is a very clever book, but of course if you read that review of it, it would spoil it for you. I do wish I could cure you of reading reviews. It spoils one's pleasure so, and does not the least good.'

'I'll try to give it up,' said Nita, meekly. 'Shall we go with you to the great gate? Mr. Wellfield, would you like to come?'

Jerome accompanied the two ladies to the great gate. Then Nita thought she would walk on with Miss Shuttleworth to her house, and Jerome thought he would stroll round the grounds. Nita told him that they supped at half-past eight, and she disappeared with Miss Shuttleworth through the gate. Jerome wandered back along the river walk, and through the old gardens, and strolled and loitered amongst the trees. Presently the sun declined, and gorgeous hues of purple and gold and crimson set the western sky ablaze, and coloured the water of the river with changing tints. The trees waved softly overhead—the water murmured placidly as it rolled by. All was still and quiet, and he tried to realise that he was here—a stranger. It was all so familiar as to be almost weirdly so. These strange faces, strange owners, jarred upon him. He could not understand how they came to be so at home there—so at ease in *his* home. As for him—when he should have supplied Monk's Gate with a little furniture, just enough to make it habit-

able, and established Avice here, his ready-cash would be almost exhausted, and then what was to become of him? The pittance —not certain, but probable—of which Mr. Netley had spoken, remained. He could not live upon that—he might die upon it, starve upon it, go mad upon it; he could not live upon it — as a man with his ideas, his hopes, his inborn, inbred habits and feelings, understands life, even in its narrowest sense.

After a long time spent in such meditations—meditations which dimmed the beauty of the sunset, and marred the evening's glory, he looked up, and found that the pomp of the *Sonnenuntergang* was over; the purple and gold had disappeared; the sky was grey again. It must be supper-time. He bent his steps towards the house.

Entering the hall he saw Nita going across it, with a large crystal bowl of flowers in her hand. She had on a black flowing dress of something soft and gauzy, with knots of brightly-hued ribbons here and there.

Whether by design or by accident, she had greatly improved her appearance, and looked as nearly pretty as it was possible for her to be; but the air of delicacy and a slight languor, speaking of a constitution not of the strongest kind, prevented her from being really beautiful. But she was agreeable, even attractive to look at, and had quaint original little ways which gave a charm to her. If she did not move with the air of a great lady, nor shine with the noble beauty of Sara Ford, she was yet not without her charm, as Jerome felt, when she paused, balancing the vase in her hands, looking up at him and smiling.

'You have had a long stroll, Mr. Wellfield, and I am sure you will be tired. William,' she added, to a page-boy who then appeared upon the scene, 'show Mr. Wellfield to the blue-room, and send Mary to see that he has all he wants.'

When Jerome came down again, the same boy appeared, and invited him into the drawing-room. How well he remembered

it as he had last seen it, and how great was the contrast between the dim old room of sixteen years ago and the luxurious one of to-day, furnished in the richest and most approved style, with gorgeously decorated ceiling, and every kind of 'upholsterer's darling' in the shape of easy-chairs, couches and lounges, scattered about!

Nita was there with her work, and Mr. Bolton with the newspapers, and a third person, a young man whose face, as Jerome looked at him, brought back the past with a vividness, with a rush, as it were, which more than ever carried him backwards, and made the immediate past seem like a dream in the light of sixteen years ago.

'John Leyburn, if I am in my right mind!' he exclaimed, for him almost eagerly.

'I think you may safely assume that your judgment does not misguide you.'

'Though you *do* say that the evidence of your own senses is the last thing you would believe, John,' observed Nita, with asperity.

John laughed, as he shook hands with Wellfield.

'Not the last thing I would believe, but the first thing I would distrust, if I had grounds for doubting about anything,' he answered.

'And how have you been going on?' asked Jerome, after the usual fashion of one man to another. To which Leyburn replied modestly:

'Oh, fairly well.'

'Fairly well, indeed!' retorted Nita. 'You have got on very well indeed, John. My cousin has got a big house and a big mill, and a huge business, all to himself, Mr. Wellfield. And he calls that getting on "fairly well."'

'And you?' asked Leyburn.

'I—very ill, as no doubt you have heard. But that doesn't matter. I am glad to see you again. Do you live at Abbot's Knoll yet? Do you remember coming down here to do Latin with my tutor, Phillips? What an age it seems since then!'

'I remember,' said John, deliberately.

He was a young man who could not be called handsome; beside Wellfield he looked exceedingly plain, with his square-cut, rather heavy face, and decidedly clumsy figure. Yet about this young manufacturer, with his want of grace and polish, there was the charm of a candid, benevolent, truth-loving nature, which charm showed in the clear, pleasant light-brown eyes, which redeemed him from insignificance, and made him an agreeable companion. He was quiet, decidedly. Jerome remembered that in the old days when they had both been children together, he had been, not shy, but a silent, reserved, observant boy, with decided likes and dislikes. By-and-by, Leyburn went and sat down beside Nita on the sofa. They appeared to be on squabbling terms, which naturally implies intimacy. Mr. Bolton looked benevolently at them over his newspaper, and Jerome, with a sudden sense which was not altogether a pleasurable one, began to wonder if this were 'a case.' No, he did not like the idea—why, he hardly knew, since it could not

possibly matter anything to him; but it seemed to shut him more entirely than ever out from all that should have been his. With rapid, unreasonable foresight, he pictured Nita and her cousin man and wife, in safe and secure possession of the Abbey and its lands, with perhaps children to inherit them, and money in abundance to keep it all up. The idea galled and hurt him excessively, and he sat silently, and somewhat moodily pondering upon it until supper was announced.

It appeared that early hours were the rule at the Abbey. After supper, Mr. Bolton retired to one end of the huge drawing-room to a table on which stood a reading-lamp, and he was soon lost in a book of travels in the South Seas. Nita and the two young men were left to entertain one another as they chose. Jerome was somewhat taciturn, observing the incessant conversation, friendly squabbles and unmistakable real liking between Nita Bolton and John Leyburn. About ten o'clock Leyburn said good-night.

By half-past ten all the household were in their rooms. Jerome opened his window and looked out. The same moon, only fuller, as that which had lighted his meditations in Manchester, shone here, and silvered the old Abbey gardens, and the ancient walks, and the motionless trees. His heart was sore as heart could be. These people were not what he had expected, and perhaps that added to the sting of his vexation. They were not purse-proud, vulgar upstarts. They were plain and homely, but gentle and gracious. It was not some vulgar man who held and who would inherit his patrimony; it was a man whose whole character and aspect compelled respect and even admiration, and a girl in whose eyes dwelt gentleness and goodness, and whose ways were all kind and womanly and girlish. He pondered over it all, and looked again upon the beauty of it, and muttered to himself:

'Mine by right—mine before God! and it shall be mine again, too.'

CHAPTER IV.

NITA'S DIARY.

IN her room at the same hour sat Nita Bolton : the door locked, the lamp lighted. She was attired in a flowing dressing-gown, her hair falling in two long, thick plaits over her shoulders. Nita had beautiful hair—beautiful, that is, in quality, if not remarkable in colour. It was of a dull, soft brown, without the suspicion of a tawny hue in it, or of a glint of gold, but it was slightly wavy, fine, soft, and abundant, and she had a harmless pride and pleasure in it.

She was seated just now at a very elegant-looking writing-table, an article of furniture

which had so far been also distinctly an article of luxury, for Nita's letters were very, very few. It was not a letter with which she was this night engaged. No! Open before her was a substantially-bound volume, with a Chubb's lock, and a little key to open and close the same—a precaution which lost some of its value when one considers how easy it would have been for an evil-disposed person to carry off the book, lock and all, if he wished to pry into the sacred contents thereof. In this precious volume Miss Bolton was in the habit of inscribing her day's adventures, or no-adventures, and her own valuable comments and reflections thereupon, together with dark and gloomy musings upon the sorrows and misfortunes of this present life; the strange and inexplicable arrangements of Destiny (with a capital D), and a chronicle of her mental experiences in general. Many pages of such lucubrations filled the earlier portion of the volume.

To-night Anita's pen had not run with its accustomed rapidity over the page. She had

recorded how 'John returned from London yesterday morning, and came in in the evening and brought me some novels, because he said he knew I cared for nothing else, which was mean of the dear old fellow.' How 'Aunt Margery came to dinner, and sat with me all afternoon, and was very amusing. What a clever old thing she is!' How, 'about six o'clock, I heard papa's voice, and looked up, wondering what had dragged him away from his beloved Dante, at that hour, and I saw him coming along with a gentleman, a stranger, the very handsomest man I ever saw.' Then followed a minute description of the introduction, of every word that Jerome had said, that Aunt Margery and papa had said, that 'I' had said, and in addition, what 'I' thought on the subject: To her diary Nita might betray, and did betray what she would conceal from all others, the fact that from the moment in which she had looked up and met Jerome's eyes, she had been fascinated, spell-bound, possessed with the thought of him.

Much unpublished as well as published rubbish is written every year, and Nita Bolton's journal was not an exception to the rule that most young ladies' journals are not worth the time that is spent upon them. Her cousin John having discovered once by accident that Nita kept a journal, had ever since oppressed her at intervals with cruel remarks upon it, questions as to what she had written about, insinuating inquiries, 'Did you mention how agreeable I made myself the other night?' and so on.

Mr. Bolton had laughed a little when he heard about it, and had said:

'She's dull. Girls must have some outlet for their feelings. It's better to sentimentalise in a diary than with a curate. I'd rather she sat up late scribbling, than rose at cock-crow to get cold at "early celebrations," and all that rubbish—eh, Jack?'

To which 'Jack' always and devoutly yielded his assent.

Nita, on this particular occasion, had more and darker reflections to make than usual,

upon the dark and tortuous ways of 'Destiny.' Such effusions might be the result of a mere surface feeling, or they might be the indications of some deeper, more tragic emotion. Who was to say? Nita herself less than anyone.

'I never,' she wrote, '*never* before saw, or imagined anyone in the least like him. It was like seeing a new kind of creature.'

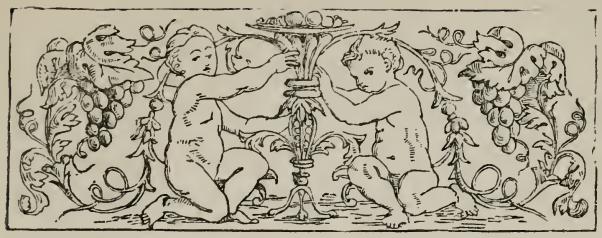
Then there was a long pause, as she laid her pen down, folded her hands, and pondered. Then she took up her pen again and wrote:

'He may well look sad and melancholy, and gaze sorrowfully on the scene around him. He may well look long and gravely at *me* when he speaks to me. Only quite a short time ago, he supposed himself the heir to all this place, and now he is dispossessed, and it is *I* who shall sometime have it! What romances there are in the world, far wilder romances than one reads of in books. How will it all end? What hand has brought us together in this strange manner—

I and he, of all persons in the world? This is indeed one of those dark mazes of life through which one must wander on trust—one can *know* nothing.'

Having written thus far, Nita carefully read over the chronicle, closed and locked the book, and put it away. Then, starting with a sudden movement, she ran to the window, opened it and leaned out, looking forth upon the moonlight. To a romantic mind and one given to sentimental musings, Wellfield Abbey must have been provocative of much moon-gazing and many reveries. Nita Bolton was romantic, was sentimental, in no small degree, though these qualities had been well kept in check by the healthy and natural though quiet life which she had lived, and by the perpetual shafts of satire directed against all sentiment by her three associates—her father, her Aunt Margery, and her cousin, John Leyburn. But the tendency to weaving romance out of her surroundings, if they would by any means allow it, was there, powerful, though dormant.

The fire smouldered. It needed but a spark to kindle it. The sudden appearance of Jerome Wellfield supplied that spark. Nita's innate love of sentiment and romance was aroused. It appeared as if life suddenly contained a new, fresh interest. It was long before the girl undressed, and then it was long before she slept. At last slumber came, and dreams in which Wellfield had no part.



CHAPTER V.

WITH THE STREAM.

MORNING again—a hazy, glorious August morning. When Wellfield threw open his window, a draught of air scented with everything that is sweetest and most exquisite was borne into the room. The heavy trees outside stood motionless ; the dazzling spikes of gladiolus, and the parterres of geraniums looked dim in the morning mist which still hung white and palpable over the course of the river. Each day that Jerome passed here was fairer than the last ; each morning and each evening made more palpable to him what a goodly heritage had departed from

him, and fallen to the lot of others. This may have influenced his course: who shall say what and where is the first upspringing of that current which, slight at first, presently grows so strong as to sway our actions and decide our 'will' to some particular course?

On going downstairs, he found the breakfast-table spread, and Mr. Bolton seated at it. Nita was standing in the window, the newspaper in one hand, while the other caressed the head of her great dun-coloured mastiff, Speedwell—another dear friend who, like nature, 'never would betray the heart that loved' him. Mr. Bolton made a measured apology for beginning his breakfast, adding that he had to go to Burnham by the nine o'clock train, but would be in to dinner in the middle of the day, and he hoped Mr. Wellfield would do just what was agreeable to him, and Nita would do her best to entertain him.

With which Nita also advanced, looking rather pale, but also almost pretty. She laid down the paper, remarking:

'There's nothing in it, papa. The market is up, and there is a leading article absolutely annihilating the Opposition, so let that content you until this evening.'

'I suppose it must,' said he, rising; and wishing them good-morning, he departed.

Nita, when breakfast was over, proposed a tour round the garden, she had some orders to give the gardener, and must go to the farm, or perhaps he would prefer to stay indoors.

'I should prefer to go with you if I may,' he said; and they strolled out together.

Nita appeared quite at home outside the house. During their progress round the garden Jerome grew more interested in her, and with him, to be interested in a woman was to do his utmost to make himself interesting to her. Nita was not aware of this idiosyncrasy; and a man cannot say to a woman, 'Do not make yourself interesting to me, or I shall try in turn to captivate you.' The rules of etiquette do not allow such a statement, but when a man's heart is given in

one direction, he may intimate that fact, and make it quite palpable to another woman, without absolutely saying in so many words, 'I am engaged; do not fall in love with me,' and he may do this without hurting her feelings or her self-respect. Jerome Wellfield did not do this.

'There is a farm belonging to the Abbey,' observed Nita, 'and papa leaves all the management of it to me: he only cares for his books when he leaves business, so I have the farm and the gardens and the house—indeed, everything connected with our life here—to look after.'

'Quite alone?' asked Jerome.

'Yes; because I have no brothers or sisters, and very few friends. I am the only one, and I am glad of it.'

'Are you? Is it not rather lonely?'

'I never feel lonely. I don't know what it is to feel lonely. And sometimes I think it is only the heroines of novels who ever do feel so; but when I once said so to Aunt Margaret, she said who was I to talk? and

desired me to wait until I had had a little more experience of life.'

'Let us hope you may never have any experience in that line,' said Jerome, smiling.

'Why, do you know what it is to be lonely?'

'No; I have never felt particularly oppressed by that sensation. But, talking about brothers and sisters, I should have thought you would have been—we won't say less lonely, since you take exception to the term—but would have enjoyed life more if you had had some of them.'

'I don't see it,' persisted Nita. 'I am very happy as I am. I like my own way. I don't care to be interfered with. A brother would take the first place in papa's heart, and have the first say in everything; and a sister —no, I would rather not.'

'You are exclusive, and contented. Some day you will have power more undivided than now, even,' said Jerome, dwelling with a morbid persistency on the idea which at present haunted him. 'I suppose you like thinking of that too?'

'Yes,' said Nita, frankly and unthinkingly, 'I do; I love to think that I am not going to leave this dear old place, ever. And I love to think that some day, though I hope not for a very long time, it will be my very own.'

She looked up at him with a smile, as she finished; met his eyes, read the expression in them, stopped abruptly, and said, in a voice of consternation:

'Oh dear, oh dear!'

Her face was covered with a flood of colour. For a moment she put her hand before it, as if to cover it, then dropped it again.

'What must you think of me?' she exclaimed, in a voice full of tears. 'Pray forgive me, if you can!'

'Pray do not distress yourself,' he rejoined, a curious flavour, half bitterness, half amusement, in his voice—'I led up to it; I wanted to hear you confess it. I felt sure you were too natural not to feel so. You are quite right; you and yours have not stolen the place.

You came by it honestly, and have a right to rejoice in it if you like.'

He made a step onwards, inwardly wondering a little why he *had* led up to this topic. Nita's face was downcast, as she said, in a deep tone of annoyance and vexation :

'It does not matter. I am a little fool, I believe. After all my resolutions that I would not drop a syllable that could wound you while you were here—*idiot* that I am!'

'Did you make such resolutions?' asked Wellfield, suddenly stopping again, and bending his eyes beneath their frowning brows upon her.

'Yes. Oh, don't look so severe, Mr. Wellfield, or I shall have to go in. Indeed it was an oversight, my saying such a thing.'

'I wish you would not take it so to heart,' he said, with a short laugh. 'It is well that I should learn to grow accustomed to my position. You have given me the first lesson, that is all. Shall we go on?'

Nita answered nothing, but paced on beside him. Jerome was fully aware in his

secret heart that his last speech was claptrap; but if it had the same effect upon Nita as if it had been fresh from the real well of pathos, what did it matter? There was a vague feeling present in his mind, that Nita seemed to take a good deal of interest in him—a feeling which gave him suddenly great interest in her.

'You are very fond of the Abbey, then?' he asked.

'Yes—very.'

'Why so? What makes you like it so much? Stop! I am sure you need not give orders to the gardener this very moment. Take one other turn with me on the river walk. Why are you so devoted to the Abbey?'

'I can hardly tell,' she answered, a little shyly. (Evidently she was dreadfully afraid of hurting him by any second remark like that one which had already, as it were, exploded like a conversational bombshell. To her he was still the lord of the soil, despite her love for the place, and her keen sense of joy in the

possession of it. He saw the feeling in a moment, and it gratified him.) 'I hardly know,' repeated Nita; 'it seems to have grown part of my life—it is so different from other places. It suits me. I was so glad when we came here.'

'And you knew when you came that you were the only child of your father, and you liked the idea of sometime reigning at the old place?' pursued Jerome, tranquilly.

'Yes. Oh, do please excuse me. I did like it very much. But if I had known about you, I should not have liked it; and I shall not like it now.'

'Known about me!—you mean that you were unaware of the existence of such a person?'

'No; I had heard of you. But Aunt Margaret—is a little prejudiced, I think. She knows all the traditions of the place, and all the histories of all the old families in it, and she used to say that—that your father——'

'What about my father, Miss Bolton?'

'It was not your father in particular. It was the Wellfield family. She had a dislike to—no, not a dislike. Aunt Margaret never has such strong feelings as likes and dislikes. She said your family were proud and unscrupulous, that they had never worked for others, or cared for any but themselves; that they were—but I have no business to say such things,' said Nita, who had by this time become so nervous and so confused as not really to know what she was saying, and who rambled on, fascinated by the calm, pale face and intent dark eyes of her companion. She spoke of the old Wellfields as if they had been a dream, and did not realise that this man beside her was actually one of the race.

'Go on, please,' he said; and Nita continued, as if it had been a lesson she was repeating by heart.

'That they were selfish and luxurious——'

'The last fault will not be laid to their charge in this generation, at least,' observed Jerome. 'Well, what else?'

'I am only saying all this because you

make me!' said Nita, with almost passionate protest in her voice, 'not because I wish to. She says—but I will tell you no more. I will not be so odious. If you really desire to hear such things, ask Aunt Margaret. She will tell you, and will not spare anything on account of your name and your race.'

'Thank you. I shall have a little conversation with her some day. I can quite imagine that she thought it was an unmitigated benefit when the Abbey passed from the hands of our dissolute race into the honest and untainted ones of your father.'

'I knew you would never forgive me, and yet you would make me go on,' said Nita, in a tone of despairing resignation. 'I can't help it. I wash my hands of it.'

'You at least may "wash your hands in innocency,"' he replied. 'Since my old home is never to be mine, I would as soon you had it as anyone; and since you wish for it more than for anything in the world——'

'There is one thing now which I feel

that I wish for more,' said Nita, in a vibrating voice.

'Is there? What is that?'

'That you — that those whose home it really is, should own it once again. I would gladly leave it now to let you come into it.'

'That is generously said, and I thank you for it,' said Jerome, in a voice not altogether unmoved. His eyes looked gratefully into hers. He took her hand, and carried it to his lips. Nita thrilled from head to foot. Was this the same world as the world of twenty-four hours ago?

'To know that goes as near as anything can to reconciling me to my inevitable loss,' he said, still in a low tone, as they resumed their way.

They left the solitary, silent river walk, dangerous in its beauty and its associations, for the more prosaic regions of the kitchen-garden. While they waited for the gardener to come, Nita said:

'Don't let me keep you here. I shall be ever so long; and then I have to go to the

farm. You will want to go down to Monk's Gate, I daresay.'

'I do; but I am emboldened to ask a favour of you, first.'

'What is that?'

'When you have quite finished your business here, will it be too much to ask you to come down to Monk's Gate, and give me a little advice? There is some furniture in it, but I don't know whether it can be used. I am a man, you see, and naturally helpless in such a case. If you did not mind very much——'

'I shall be delighted. I will come down as soon as ever I have finished. Shall I find you there?'

'You will find me there. If not in the house, in the garden; and if not in the garden, in the house. Thank you, very much.'

Lifting his hat he left her, and went down the river walk.

Adamson, the gardener, found his young mistress strangely distraite and forgetful—a phenomenon which puzzled him, for he was

wont to bear admiring testimony to her clearness of head, and readiness of comprehension, saying: 'Eh, but hoo's a rare sharp un, is Miss Bolton. Hoo's a chip of the 'owd block in more ways nor one, *hoo* is.'

* * * * *

Wellfield, meanwhile, had taken his way down the river walk, the entrance to which was in the village street, close beside the ancient stone bridge. On the other side of this bridge, a stony, steep, wood-shaded walk led invitingly up a hill, then bent round to the left, leaving the rest of that enticing way to conjecture. This path, as Jerome remembered, took one to the top of a hill called Wellfield Nab or Neb, or simply 'the Nab.' He remembered climbing it sixteen years ago, with his tutor and John Leyburn; and the glorious view of the surrounding country which it commanded, he remembered too.

At the foot of the Nab, almost out of sight from the bridge, he could just catch a glimpse of a couple of gables, belonging to the Abbot's Knoll house—Leyburn's dwelling. John rode

every morning to his mill, which was some two miles distant, on the road to Burnham.

Down the quaint paved street Jerome walked towards the church, that ancient 'white church under the hill,' which had weathered so many storms and troubles. A sleepy place, Wellfield—a place which seemed forgotten of all men save the few who lived in it.

Monk's Gate was only a very few minutes' walk from the church, the clock of which struck eleven as Jerome opened the gate of the garden.

He unlocked the door, and went into the house again, but did not remain there long. He felt that he really did require Nita's assistance, and must wait until she arrived.

The quiet and sunshine of the old-fashioned, untidy garden were congenial to him. He wandered about it, inhaling the scent of roses and carnations, and the rich, spicy odours of picotees and the old-fashioned white pink. The sun shone pleasantly upon everything, doing his best towards ripening the

young pears and apples on the trees, and bringing the flowers into more ample bloom. Where is the charm that can compete with that which pervades an old-fashioned English garden ?—the flavour of grace and quaintness, and the suggestions of a 'gentle life' which hang about such a garden are to be found nowhere else.

Wellfield had turned his back to the gate, and was looking at the great, blunt, boulder-shaped head of Penhull, and observing the purple mist of heather which clothed its mighty sides, when a voice behind him said :

'Mr. Wellfield !'

He turned, a curious thrill shooting through him. The speaker must, he thought, have almost stolen up to him, so noiseless had been his approach. He confronted a tall, spare man, in the dress of an ecclesiastic. The voice in which he had spoken was soft and musical ; he took off his hat with a smile, as Jerome's eyes met his, and the smile was a singularly fascinating one, giving an expression of exceeding graciousness and sweetness

to a pale, finely cut, ascetic-looking countenance. There was a courtly grace in the man's appearance, in his bow and manner.

For a moment Wellfield paused, then, bowing in his turn, said:

'Surely I cannot be mistaken—you are the Father Pablo Somerville whom I met years ago?'

'The same,' he replied. 'I am glad to find you remember me. For me, I saw you as I passed the garden, and concluded it was you; but had I met you anywhere else, I should have known you instantly.'

'Am I so little changed, then?'

'Not much. And,' with a slight smile, 'even had you changed a good deal, yours is not a face one soon forgets.'

Wellfield held out his hand, saying cordially, 'I am glad to see you.' He felt glad. In Somerville's presence he felt at ease—felt as though he were with one of his own kind; a sensation he had never experienced since before his father's death, and which was pleasant to him, as it is pleasant to return to

European civilisation, with its beloved and elaborate shams, after wandering amidst the primitive and repulsive honesty of savages; as it is pleasant to return to stove-heated rooms and a perfumed atmosphere, to rich meats and dainty wines, after a forced sojourn amongst bare boards, hard pallets, and a diet of bread and water. Such exactly was the sensation experienced now by Wellfield, as he clasped hands with this high-bred, polished-looking priest and man of the world.

'I would ask you into my house, but I doubt whether there is a chair in it fit to sit upon. I only arrived here yesterday, and am surveying now all the home that I have.'

'The Abbey has passed away from you, as I heard,' observed Somerville. 'That is a pity, for many reasons. We at Brentwood at least regret it. In the old days, when your forefathers belonged to us, Wellfield Abbey was noted far and wide for the munificence of its gifts, and the splendour of its hospitality. Even in the days when your people were Protestants, they have always

been gentlemen—Wellfields, despite the Protestantism, and they have never treated us churlishly. Down to the last visit of your late father to the Abbey, we were always received with hospitality and kindness—then, especially, for Mrs. Wellfield was there——'

'My mother!' exclaimed Jerome, eagerly, 'Did you ever see her? Were you at the Abbey then?'

'It is a long time ago. Twenty-four years ago. I was a lad of thirteen; and I was even then destined for the priesthood. I have been at Brentwood all my life. I was taken by one of the professors, to call at Wellfield Abbey, and I remember it well to this day. It was winter weather, and there were roaring fires all over the old house. Mr. Wellfield complained of everything being heated to furnace-heat. Your beautiful young mother—and she *was* beautiful—sat crouching over a huge fire, with you—a little infant—swathed in warm shawls, in her arms. I think all the beauty of her beautiful land was concentrated in her. What wonder that

I sat and gazed at her, and thought her like the Madonna, and wondered how Father Leigh presumed to talk, and even laugh with her ?'

'You remember all this!' exclaimed Jerome, earnestly. 'Since I came here, almost every hour has brought back some incident, some recollection, some remembered face, which have made the reverse more cruel, and more terrible to bear, than I had imagined anything could be.'

'I can well believe it. *Autres temps, autres mœurs.* Things are changed now, from that time of gracious hospitality and high-bred courtesy. The present owner of Wellfield Abbey' (a slight sneer played about the finely-cut lips) 'detests "Papists" with a truly Protestant candour and liberality. I must say, even if it appear like boasting, that his bigotry is his misfortune, since the "Papists" he objects to are the only society worthy of the name in the neighbourhood.'

'I suppose so,' said Jerome, whose face had grown dark during this discourse. He

was pacing with Somerville up and down the gravel walk.

'Yes. The Lathebys of Latheby—do you remember them?'

'The name I know well enough. What of them?'

'They were formerly on the best of terms with the Abbey. You must come and see the exquisite chapel which Mrs. Latheby has offered to Brentwood. And the Ormes of Brownhill, and some others—these are the only gentry, and the only cultivated people for miles around. But Mr. Bolton does not care to associate with such popish *canaille*.'

He smiled again, more sneeringly than before, and Jerome felt his heart warm towards him. This classification of Mr. Bolton with one world, and of himself with quite another, was not unpleasant to him.

'Many things have happened which go sorely against the grain with me,' he rejoined. 'The mischief of it is, my hands are tied. I am powerless, because I am moneyless.'

'I have heard of your losses,' said Father

Somerville, 'and regret them. You will believe me, Mr. Wellfield, when I say that we at Brentwood would have welcomed you back in any case, rich or poor, with the Abbey or without it, as a gentleman and a civilised being. We shall welcome you as it is, if you decide to settle amongst us—welcome you heartily. And you will think no wrong when I say that had you been coming amongst us to take that position which in the sight of heaven you ought to have, we should have welcomed you, not more sincerely, but perhaps more openly and ceremoniously.'

'You flatter me,' said Jerome, a flush of something like pleasure on his cheek. 'Such a welcome can by no means be indifferent to me. As to settling here myself, it seems the only thing for me to do at present. At any rate, even if I should have to leave, I shall bring my sister here, and she will live here.

'Your sister! How old is Miss Wellfield, if I may ask?'

'Sixteen. She is at present in Germany with—a friend.'

'I see. When you have settled things, you will bring her here. And yourself—pardon these inquiries, and do not answer them if you think them not allowable, but——'

'They are more than allowable. They are very kind; and I feel it a privilege to be able to speak to you of my affairs,' returned Wellfield, with some animation. 'Myself, I consider destitute until I have found some employment. What little remains of my fortune, I shall devote entirely to my sister's use. With strict economy, and in this quiet place, I may make it suffice for her wants. They say trade is good. I may succeed in finding a clerk's place in some office, in which a "thorough knowledge of several foreign languages" is a desideratum, though, to tell the truth, I should first have to learn the entire technique of any business I entered. I should be a bad bargain at first for any employer, whatever glories I might attain to later in the matter of book-keeping or correspondence. Still, I may earn enough to keep me—what do I know?'

He threw up his head, and laughed a little, plunging his hands into his pockets. Father Somerville watched him narrowly and unobserved. The study pleased him, interested him, made him curious to pursue it further.

There was a pause till the priest said :

'If I remember aright, you are a good musician, Mr. Wellfield.'

'Yes. It is the only thing I have—the only talent my God has given me. Of much use it appears it will be to me!'

'Hush, hush, sir! As you say, your God has given it to you, and He doubtless had some purpose in so endowing you.'

'I beg your pardon, muttered Jerome. 'It is not my habit to speak in that manner; but I have been harassed almost to madness by the embarrassments and difficulties of my position. Sometimes I have wondered whether the last Wellfield was sent into the world to make a name and a fortune on the stage.'

'I can well understand your feelings. Where are you staying?' he added, suddenly.

'At an inn? Will you not come and take shelter with us at Brentwood. They would be——'

'I thank you. I am staying at the Abbey.'

'Ah, at the Abbey? Then you simply came down here for a stroll. Will they turn you out of the Abbey as a polluted thing if you enter Brentwood to take a meal there?'

'I don't suppose they would; but at this moment I am waiting, and must continue to wait until she comes, for Miss Bolton, who has been kind enough to promise me her assistance in deciding what part of the lumber inside here is fit to keep and which is good only to be cast into the fire.'

'You know Miss Bolton, then?'

'I made her acquaintance, and that of her father, yesterday; and they asked me to stay with them until my business here was done.'

'Her father is enormously rich.'

'Is he? I knew he must be rich from the sum he paid my father for the Abbey. I did not know his wealth was "enormous."'

'But it is, without any exaggeration. He

has been one of the most successful manufacturers in Burnham, and does an immense foreign trade: perhaps your knowledge of foreign languages might be useful to him. Knowledge *is* power, you know, let fools say what they may against it,' observed Father Somerville, who had a way of throwing out hints which suggested the largest possibilities, in a casual careless way which was quite peculiar to him.

'It is no small thing to be one of the wealthiest manufacturers of Burnham,' he went on. 'In plain English, it means an income like that of a nobleman—an income which in this case is not one quarter spent, but which goes on accumulating in excellent investments. . . And Miss Bolton is sole heiress?'

'Yes — so I understand,' said Jerome, absently, his mind occupied with the priest's suggestion that perhaps his knowledge of languages might prove useful to Mr. Bolton. Why not? It would be well for him if it should turn out to be so. The natural indolence of his half-southern temperament made

the idea of strenuous exertion in search of employment, which hardly could in the nature of things be remunerative, utterly abhorrent to him ; and he grasped with the more eagerness at the idea suggested by Somerville's words.

The latter was tempted to smile at what at first appeared the obtuseness of the young man. But he was a man of the world. Wellfield's absence of mind, and his unconsciousness of the hint which lay behind that remark about the sole heiress, might be an innocence which would certainly be refreshing in one who must have been the object of so much matrimonial angling as Jerome Wellfield, in the days when he had been the supposed heir to the Abbey and a fortune ; but it also might not be innocence at all. It might be that some deeper reason caused that obtuseness. Probably young Wellfield was in love already. With his disposition, and with the life he had led, it was most unlikely that he should have travelled so far in life without ever having had his heart touched.

Pablo Somerville knew when to be reserved and when to be open, even cynically open and candid. He judged this a fitting occasion on which to display the latter qualities.

'She knows it, I should imagine?' he said.

'Yes—of course, yes. She told me this morning how pleased she often felt at the idea of one day owning the Abbey,' said Jerome, still not awake to the palpable bearings of the case.

('*Quelle bêtise!*—how like a *roturier!*' flashed rapidly through Somerville's mind; 'if she likes the Abbey, no doubt she would like the owner—the once owner!')

Aloud, he said, striking at once me, and sharply:

'Has a *mariage de convenance* never occurred to you as a way out of your difficulties?' he inquired, in a thoroughly matter-of-fact, composed tone.

Jerome abruptly came to a dead stop. His eyes leaped to the other's face. The priest looked at him with a slight cool smile, half rallying, half surprised.

'Never,' at last replied Wellfield, almost frigidly. But his heart was beating fast and suddenly.

'I am surprised at that. I should fancy it would be very easily arranged. And then, if you really wish for employment, nothing would be easier than to find it. It is always to be bought, if you will pay dear enough for it. Were you but a Catholic, I know of one—two marriages of that kind, which might soon be negotiated through our influence. As it is, I am not Jesuit enough to pretend that I would connive at marrying a Catholic heiress to a heretic, even where the heretic is Jerome Wellfield.'

Jerome laughed a little. 'It would certainly be a good deal to expect,' said he.

'It would, since you would probably not only marry the heiress, but convert her, if you wished to. But why should you not think of Miss Bolton? You would soon win her, and, with her, regain your patrimony and your home.'

He did not expatiate upon the subject.

Jerome, engrossed by his real love, had absolutely not once thought of Miss Bolton in the light in which she was now held up to him. She was very rich. Some time she would be the mistress of Wellfield Abbey. He rather liked her, in a superior, patronising kind of way, but otherwise she was utterly indifferent to him; whereas every fibre of his heart was powerfully drawn in another direction.

'Impossible, Father! The circumstances make it out of the question,' said he, coldly and decisively.

'The course is clear,' said the priest, calmly. 'Miss Bolton is not engaged. She is anything but disagreeable or stupid. Considering her training, she is a marvel of refinement; and if you married her you could make her into what you pleased. You have no rivals, and if you had, none here who could for a moment compete with yourself.'

'Pardon me; I know nothing of Miss Bolton's feelings, of course, but unless I am much mistaken I have—should have, I

mean—a rival in her cousin, John Leyburn, as good a fellow as ever breathed.'

Father Somerville laughed—laughed as a man laughs who has heard a jest full of a quaint conceit which delights him. He had a musical laugh, and there was nothing offensive in his manner.

'A good fellow enough, and liberal minded. I have encountered him once or twice on local business. But a girl like Miss Bolton wants something more than a good fellow for a husband—something different, at least. She lives alone, reads novels and poetry, has known Mr. Leyburn all her life, while you—bah! my dear sir, the idea of a rivalry is absurd.'

'Your imagination is vivid. I say again, it is out of the question. No. Wellfield is gone from me, and I must abide without it as best I may.'

('A woman in the case, assuredly,' thought the priest, 'or he would never hesitate. No Wellfield ever did hesitate at so easy a means of making himself at ease again. It was

honest work that always made that race kick and plunge.')

Before he could speak aloud the gate had been opened, and Nita, accompanied by Speedwell, her mastiff, entered the garden.

'We must drop that topic,' murmured Somerville with a slight smile, as he bowed low to the girl, who returned the salutation very slightly, saying with marked coolness of manner to Jerome:

'You are engaged, Mr. Wellfield. I am intruding, and will come another time.'

'By no means,' said Somerville, quickly. 'I must go—I was on the point of taking leave.'

'But I shall see you again,' said Jerome.

'Certainly, and often, if I consult my own inclination,' said Somerville, with his strange, sweet smile. 'Call at Brentwood, and ask for me at any hour after vespers, and I shall receive you with pleasure.'

Nita, followed by her dog, had walked into the house while these farewell amenities were taking place.

'Will you not come to-morrow?' added Father Somerville.

'Thank you. I shall be glad to do so.'

'That is well. Then, *auf Wiedersehen!*'

He lifted his hat, and was gone. Jerome entered the house, and found Nita standing at the window of the larger parlour, motionless, her eyes fixed upon the retreating figure of the priest in his long black soutane. Speedwell, his forepaws upon the window-ledge, looked too. Nita did not hear Jerome. She was too absorbed in her watch, but as he entered, he saw her pat her dog's head and heard a low 'Ss-s!' from her lips.

'Miss Bolton!' he exclaimed, in astonishment, while Speedwell's low, thunderous growl was exchanged for two deep, angry barks.

Nita started, turned, and laughed.

'Are you shocked?' she said. 'I do so hate that man. I call him the "Polished Panther." I should not wish to be rude to him if he is a friend of yours, but for myself, I cannot stand him, and that is all about it.'

'I can hardly call him a friend, though he is an old acquaintance. Do you know what post he has at Brentwood?'

'Oh, you know they go through a course. They don't keep on teaching the same thing. I heard the other day that he was teaching history—Jesuit history, of course, which proves beyond dispute that the Jesuits always have been right, ever since the first one first founded the order, and that everyone else always has been and will be wrong. That is what Father Somerville is teaching at present, I believe.'

'You speak with heat, and surely with a little prejudice,' said he, smiling, but—insensibly it seemed—his manner towards her had changed, had taken a shade more of interest, of familiarity; there was a subtle difference both in his feelings towards her, and the behaviour which expressed those feelings. 'Father Somerville is an accomplished——'

'Deceiver! Oh yes; I know he is. He would deceive anyone less clever than himself. I dislike him exceedingly, and so does

Speedwell. Well, shall we look at your furniture, Mr. Wellfield?'

'Thank you,' said Jerome, accepting the hint, if hint it were—'if you don't mind.'

They began with the room in which they were standing, and Nita soon displayed capacities for arranging and settling and turning things to the best advantage, which perfectly astonished Jerome. Numbers of things which he was about to cast aside as being utterly useless, she quickly reclaimed, remarking that they only wanted such and such repairs to make them serviceable and even good.

'And it would be sinful to throw away a scrap of this old furniture,' she added. 'You can't buy any like it except for fabulous prices, and then you are never sure that you are not being cheated. I am convinced that for fifty pounds or so, you may make the house very nice—at least if you will let me dispose of the fifty pounds for you,' she added, colouring a little; 'for I am sure you would be like a child—so helpless—if you went alone to a furniture shop.'

'I do not doubt it, and would accept your offer gratefully if I did not think it was imposing on your kindness.'

'Not at all. We will drive into Burnham to-morrow, and see about it,' replied Nita. 'Meantime, it is nearly dinner-time, and papa will be waiting, Shall we go back to the Abbey?'

Jerome accompanied her to her home, with new agitation in his breast, and a vague wonder whether, for the future, Monk's Gate were to be his home.

END OF VOL. I.

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